

Musha Shugyo



武者修行



IMPERIALS

A Legend of the Five Rings RPG 3rd Edition Fanzine



Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Musha Shugyo*!

Musha Shugyo is, as the cover tells you, a free fanzine about *Legend of the Five Rings RPG, 3rd Edition*. This project was initiated at the end of 2007, when I was experiencing serious RPG withdrawal symptoms, waiting for the latest L5R book to be released. All contributors are fans of the game and its world, and wanted to share their enthusiasm with other fans. Each issue will focus on a theme (minor clans, ronin, non-humans, etc.) and for *Musha Shugyo* #1, we will have a look at the imperial families and their courts.

Musha Shugyo is structured in broad sections, named after locations of the typical Rokugani city. This first issue features 6 sections, but we have more that will be added as soon as *Musha Shugyo* #2.

- **The Tea House:** here you'll find interviews with the people that make L5R, from the RPG writers to artists illustrating the game. Fred Wan did us the honor to be the first interviewed. This section also contains L5R-related news and books reviews.
- **The Library:** here you'll find in-depth articles related to the issue's theme. The focus is on providing setting information and GM aids.
- **The Dojo:** If the Library is the fluff, the Dojo is the crunch. Here you'll find new mechanics and older ones updated to the 3rd Edition rules.
- **The Smithy:** here, you'll find various tools for the GM. Among possibilities are maps of cities or buildings, and NPC complete with stats and back stories.
- **The Theater:** this section will feature fan-fictions and contribute to make Rokugan a living world.
- **The Inn:** This section is for the GM's eyes only. He'll find adventure seeds in the famous Challenge-Focus-Strike format, as well as fully developed scenarios.
- **Hanami Mura:** this city is a new location that will be developed over several issues of *Musha Shugyo*. Nestled between Cherry Blossom Snow Lake and the Shinomen Forest, it will offer an original base of operation for your campaigns.

This is a first issue, and of course it still has some kinks to iron out. Comments are very much appreciated, so feel free to post a line on the AEG forums in the dedicated thread (RPG section), or send an email to musha.shugyo.l5r@gmail.com.

Thank you for reading us, I hope you'll like what you read and you'll be back for more in *Musha Shugyo* #2.

Mikael "Otaku Mike" Brodu,
Editor in Chief

Legal Notice

Alderac Entertainment Games (AEG) has sole ownership of the names, logo, artwork and/or any proprietary material used in connection with the game *Legend of the Five Rings*. AEG has kindly granted permission to *Musha Shugyo* fanzine to use such names, logos, artwork and/or any proprietary materials for promotional and informational purposes in its pages but does not endorse, and is not affiliated with *Musha Shugyo* in any official capacity whatsoever.

Any new material provided in *Musha Shugyo* is thus not canon, and may be contradicted by future official publications by AEG.

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Mikael Brodu

EDITORS

Daniel Vallée, Nico Buitendag,
Adi Zeller & Andrew Netteberg

ART DIRECTOR / GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Mikael Brodu

COVER ARTIST

Steve Argyle

INTERIOR ARTIST

April Lee

MUSHA SHUGYO TEAM'S PRIVATE JOKE

"As long as we can release issue #1 before the Way of the Open Hand Update, we're doing fine."

The Tea House	
Interview with Fred Wan	4
The Library	
Winter Court in your Game	7
The host	7
The location	8
Description and details	8
NPCs	8
Plots	9
Contests	9
Crime	9
Espionage	9
Games	10
Love and Affairs	10
War	10
The kind of court	10
Imperial Court	10
Courts of the Clan Champions	11
Family Courts	11
Courts of the Minor Clans	11
Provincial Courts	11
Example	11
Ikoma Hariku's winter court	11
Guests	11
Plots	12
How to Use the Winter Court Trilogy	13
Kyuden Seppun	13
Overview	13
How to use this book?	14
Kyuden Kakita	14
Overview	14
How to use this book?	15
Kyuden Asako	15
Overview	15
How to use this book?	16
The Six Ministries	17
The Ministry of Finances	17
The Ministry of Rites	17
The Ministry of Public Works	17
The Ministry of the Imperial Legions	17
The Ministry of Justice	18
The Ministry of Records	18
The Imperial Guard	19
Organization of the Imperial Guard	20
Duties of the Imperial Guard	20
Trappings of the Office	21
Membership of the Imperial Guard	21
The Seppun Hidden Guard	22
Organization of the Hidden Guard	23
Duties of the Hidden Guard	23
Trappings of the Office	24
Membership of the Hidden Guard	24
Dojo of the Hidden Guard	25
The Hashira Horitsu	25
The Dojo	
Schools and Paths	26
The Emperor's Personal Guard [Bushi]	26
Seven Black Stones	
Tactical School [Bushi]	26
Imperial Matchmaker [Courtier]	27
Miya Bowman [Bushi]	27
Expanded Skills	28
Acting	28
Calligraphy	28
Courtier	28
Etiquette	28
Investigation	28
Lore	28
Storytelling	28
Battle	29
Iaijutsu	29
Deceit	29
Advantages and Disadvantages	30
Advantages	30
Affluent	30
Blissful Betrothal	30
Connected	30
Correspondence	30
Darling of the Court	30
Ear of the Emperor	30
Favor	30
Harmonic Alignment	30
Inheritance: Subtlety of the Court	30
Master of the Court	30
Sacrosanct	30
Disadvantages	30
Adopted Blood	30
A Home in Ashes	30
Blind	31
Elderly	31
Fragile	31
Madness	31
Old	31
Items	31
War Fan of Seppun Mako	31
Akkuai-Uo	31
Obi of Otomo Gosaiko	31
Imperial Breed Falcon	31
Kata	32
Sword of the Sun	32
Channeling the Void	32
Wings of Inspiration	32
Spells	32
Cryptic Cipher	32
Blood Curse	32
The Final Gift	33
Miya's Mercy	33
Miya's Sasumata	33
Ancestors	33
Profession	33
Drive	34
Imperial Heritage Tables	34
The Smithy	
Characters	36
Seppun Tsuchi	36
Toturi Yuya	36
Otomo Noriko	37
Seppun Oda	37
Miya Yodoshi	37
The Theater	
Standing Their Ground	38
The Inn	
Challenge, Focus, Strike	40
The Dark Artist	40
The Map Is Not the Territory	40
Crime Spree	41
Backstabbing	41
The Prodigy	41
The Dancing Elephant	41
The White Stag	42
Growing Pains	42
Corruption	43
Mind Over Manners	43
The Empty Pot	44
In the Name of the Emperor	45
Ambition's Inferno	46
Plot Synopsis	46
Dramatis Personae	46
The Adventure	47
Day One	47
Day Two	50
Post-Scriptum	
So, What's Next?	53

Contributors

A giant THANK YOU to the contributors who went above and beyond to make this crazy fanzine project a reality we can all be proud of. - Mike Brodu

Akodo Akira (Andrew Netteberg)	Mirumoto Kuro (David Ribeiro)
Akodo Harubi (Mike Richards)	Okuma (Mathieu Brebouillet)
Callimachus (Adi Zeller)	Otaku Mike (Mikael Brodu)
Hida Tango (Jeff Geers)	Shinjo Tegi / Doji Moriko (Kris Van Beurden)
Isawa Nazomitsu (Scott Stockton)	Shosuro Shingen (Toni Ihme)
Kalajel (Daniel Vallée)	Tokkie (Nico Buitendag)
Malempo (Jean-Philippe Lafond)	Wargames

❖ The Tea House ❖

Interview with Fred Wan

Musha Shugyo: Hi Fred. Can you introduce yourself to the readers, first the person you are, and then your job at AEG? What circumstances brought you to your current job at AEG?

Fred Wan: Sure!

My name is Fred Wan. I live in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

I hold two separate roles with AEG.

The first is as the Continuity Editor for the CCG. In that capacity, I work with the Design Team, to help make sure that the representations of the characters and clans in the card game reflect the direction of the story and universe.

The second is as the Assistant Story Lead for the Story Team as a whole. As the Assistant Story Lead, I write the outlines and plots of most of our stories (including flavor texts, Friday fictions, and our other releases). I guess you can say that my job here is to make sure the stories link together, and combine to paint a vivid and consistent image of Rokugan throughout the stories.

One very general way of thinking about it would be that Shawn Carman decides what we write—what the direction of the story as whole will be, and what a given fiction covers. I will set how we write it—which characters might be involved, and the specific tone and nuance to put on events. Then the author will write it.

There's definitely overlap between the various levels of the Story Team, though; I am just laying out a quick-and-easy way of thinking about it.

As for how I got involved in the game at this level, it is pretty convoluted (most of the times are approximates, it all happened years ago):

Several years ago, much of the discussion about L5R occurred on various Yahoo groups. I was on several of them, including the Unicorn one. Seth Mason, who was involved with the L5R RPG at the time, was also on that group. At one point, he mentioned to me that the RPG might need some freelancers, and asked if I was interested in trying out. I was, and submitted a piece. I assume Rich Wulf and/or Shawn looked at it, and they offered me a chance to do a small piece for the L5R RPG book Secrets of the Unicorn. That led to another, slightly larger, piece on the next L5R RPG book (I think it was Secrets of the Dragon), and so on.

While that was going on, I was also involved with the L5R CCG. Although I did not travel very much, I was fairly successful, and while I was not world championship caliber or anything like that, I would fairly regularly make it into elimination rounds and taking top of Clan when I

attended events in Seattle and Vancouver. Eventually, I and several other players from British Columbia were asked to form a playtest team for the CCG, which we were happy to do. After some time, I became the lead for our team.

So for a few months, I was playtest lead for British Columbia, and doing freelance work on the RPG. After those months passed, I started editing for Rich, Shawn, and Seth's fictions. At first, it was just editing for typos and errors, but as time passed, I started making suggestions on content as well. I was not "officially" the editor at that point; I was just someone that the Story Team knew and trusted, and who was cleared for both Story and Design-side secrets, so I fit the role.

A few more months passed, and Eric Devlin, who was Brand Manager at the time, called me. He told me that the Continuity Editor position was being created, and offered it to me. I eagerly accepted! Since I was getting more involved with Design at this point, I stepped down as the playtest lead for British Columbia, and Patrick Naayer, a skilled player and great person, took over.

About a year and a half or so later, Rich Wulf moved on to novel writing, Shawn moved up to being Story Lead, and Brian Yoon, Nancy Sauer, and Rusty Priske got added to the Story Team. Based on my involvement with the rest of the game over the years, I moved up into being the Assistant Lead.

MS: What are your hobbies, the games you enjoy playing? Are you playing in a RPG campaign at the moment (L5R or other)?

FW: It is probably no surprise, but I think of myself as a general "gamer"—it does not really matter if it is a CCG, RPG, video game, or whatever. I am also a comic fan, and enjoy science fiction and fantasy. My interests are fairly broad.

As for favorite games, I am fond of the Warcraft III: Frozen Throne custom map "Defense of the Ancients". CCG wise, I dabble in a variety of games; I find "Limited" (draft and sealed) formats for CCGs in general to be very enjoyable. RPG wise, I particularly enjoy the "Champions" RPG, although Mutants & Masterminds is much simpler to teach.

I am not currently involved in an RPG campaign; I have not had the time to track down a gaming group, and it is difficult to schedule in the time for regular RPG sessions.

MS: How is it to work for AEG, how do you feel about working on L5R?

FW: I love being a part of L5R; when I was still playing in tournaments, I was playing with the goal of winning story prizes. It is funny how things work out!

I treat my role on L5R as a way of contributing to a universe that has been forged by the combined efforts of players (both CCG and RPG), artists, writers, and Brand. I want the universe to be vivid, the characters memorable, and the different portrayals of Rokugan in fiction, RPG, and CCG, to all be in-line with each other, telling the same overall story. The tone will change from medium to medium, the perspectives change from character to character and clan to clan, and sometimes even the message changes a little bit from author to author, but the overall goal is to have a universe that you can picture in your head and that you care about.

I want Rokugan to be a place players of all kinds want to be a part of.

MS: Does continuity include the art side of L5R (ie, making sure Lion samurai have a distinctive and unique look, or that a Minor Clan mon is consistent across cards separated by several sets)?

FW: Yes, and I do have some input in the art process, although more of that is done by the people who are physically located in the AEG offices, and by Todd Rowland, simply because they and he have more direct contact with the artists.

MS: What is your involvement specifically with the RPG line? Are you involved in the Race for the Throne (in particular judging for the RPG-related contests)?

FW: Nearly all of my early writing was for the RPG, although right at this instant I am not directly working on it. I believe there are plans to rotate me back in to the RPG line, most likely doing the same sort of thing I do with the CCG—to make sure all the portrayals in the RPG are consistent with the overall image and vision of Rokugan.

I am definitely involved with the Race for the Throne, although I am currently not on the judging panel for the RPG-related contests. I do, however, implement the Story prizes that are awarded; it is a fairly major, and definitely important, part of my job.

MS: Are there any other games out there (from AEG or other companies) that you'd like to work on?

FW: I like games where the story and mechanics interact to reinforce each other; any project where I can help contribute to that would be of interest to me. In particular, I would love to be involved on the creative side of video game development.

MS: For the trivia fans, what is the origin of your nick, Unicorn Marketeer?

FW: In September 2001, I took a job in Communications and Marketing for a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in London. I could only pack so much L5R for

the trip. At the time, the Unicorn Clan was mechanically somewhat weak, so I decided to take a Unicorn deck and some rares-for-trade, because I thought it would be a good challenge.

A few months into my stay, the Holding card "Unicorn Marketeer" came out. The card fit very neatly into the way my deck of the time played. As a joke, my friends and I commented that if I was in the original Marketeer card's outfit, I would look fairly similar to the person depicted on the card. That, and my profession at the time was marketing.

Soon after that, I signed up for some L5R yahoogroups, and signed up as "Unicorn Marketeer". Since that point, I have kept the handle, although sometimes I have shortened it to simply "Marketeer", simply because people know who I am. It is kind of funny though, since my day job is not in marketing anymore!

MS: If you could change one thing about the game/story to suit your personal taste, what would it be?

FW: It is kind of odd, but I think one of the aspects of my role is that to a great extent, I do not allow myself to change things because of my personal preferences. The reason I say that is because my role involves changing what other people write, how CCG Design develops cards, or the direction in which we take the clans. I do not think it is fair to the rest of the Teams, or to the playerbase as a whole, if I make that kind of suggestion only because I want things to go a certain way.

Having said that, I regularly make incremental suggestions based on where I think the game needs to go, and what changes in the universe logically make sense. That process is ongoing, and to the extent that those kinds of changes can be described as "personal taste", all the Teams do that on an ongoing, regular basis.

MS: Do you think the flavor of Rokugan has changed throughout the years? If yes, what changed and why do you think the change occurred?

FW: I do think there has been a flavor change, although it is difficult to describe what it is and how it developed.

How the clans are perceived by players is an integral part of the overall flavor of Rokugan. This is separate from how the clans are portrayed, and it is a legitimate and important thing for me to consider in both of my roles. I think, over time, there has been a change in the way players interpret and perceive their clans, but in a way that is not precisely due to a change in the way the clans have been portrayed.

Players tend to form very strong impressions of the clans, both the ones they play and the ones they do not play. The problem with these strong impressions is that often, players will tend to gloss over the flaws of certain clans, or overemphasize or interpret too broadly the virtues of different clans. The precise clans, and whether they are thought of fondly or poorly, vary from player to player.

However, it is important that all players appreciate both the good sides and bad sides of the clans. In fact, I think it is even more critical that players understand

the flaws of their chosen clans, because it is the contrast between virtue and flaw, and dealing with flaws, that makes a story compelling.

So in a practical sense, I would say that there has been a change in how players see the clans as a whole, and it has occurred for natural, understandable reasons. I do think the story as a whole is stronger when both the writers and the players appreciate that the clans and their members are often short of the ideals they set.

MS: *What are the goals that you and AEG want to achieve with the upcoming RPG supplements (for the next year or two)?*

FW: I cannot speak for AEG as a whole, but I personally want to further tie together the RPG material with the storyline—something we have already been doing, but I think it is important to continue—and keep working on developing links between CCG, RPG, and fictions.

MS: *What kind of dream product you'd like to see for the RPG, but is unlikely to happen due to the reality of the market?*

FW: There are several. One would be an actual "Merchant's Guide to Rokugan"—a book that just looks at how the economy of the Empire runs. A lot of the politics and wars in the Empire are driven by simple things, such as hunger and greed.

MS: *The CCG is focusing on the Great clans. Is the RPG following the same path? Does that mean the other factions (like the Imperial Families, the Ronin, the Brotherhood or the non-humans) will receive little or no support in future books?*

FW: One thing that I like about the RPG is that we have more space in which to explore things we would not be able to do in the CCG, or cover in the fictions. The RPG is canon material, and when I was writing on it (and hopefully when I return to it), there was quite a bit of fiction and development of characters, clans, and people that we simply do not have the space to cover in the other presentations of Rokugan.

This gives us room to support things that have been downplayed in the CCG, such as ronin, the Brotherhood of Shinsei, or non-humans. I do think the emphasis in Rokugan as a whole will be placed more upon the Great Clans for overall consistency of presentation, and because the Great Clans do drive the Empire, but I do think we can and will continue to be able to portray and support other groups in the RPG.

MS: *What is, in your opinion, L5R's biggest obstacle that hinders it from becoming one of the biggest RPG on the market?*

FW: Both RPGs and CCGs have shown that being the first ever in the market is often a business advantage. D&D came first; many, possibly most, gamers learned it as their first game. This has created an externality—there are more players of D&D, so it is more attractive to new

players because the new players have an easier time finding a gaming group to enjoy.

All RPGs grapple with that; you want as many players as possible, because it then becomes easier to attract new players. So I think a challenge that L5R RPG faces is the need to be known to gamers—there needs to be a perception that it is easy to find a game to join.

MS: *The CCG has always been the driving force of the L5R storyline. Do you think the RPG should have some means to impact the storyline as well? If yes, how do you think this could be done? (I'm thinking about after the RftT is over)*

FW: The Winter Court RPG session is an example of giving RPGers a chance to influence the storyline, and the CCG too! It was a lot of fun for the players (at least that is what they tell me), and even non-playing people enjoyed reading the various adventures and exploits of various characters. So something like that would definitely be worth considering doing again.

MS: *When continuity, despite your best efforts, is broken, what can you do to fix things?*

FW: Oh yes.

There are a variety of tools open to me when two sources simply contradict each other.

The first is to downplay the clash, perhaps by emphasizing where the two are NOT contradicting each other and showing why the details that contradict are not that important.

Sometimes, particularly when the "Way of..." series and books written during that era are involved, is to remind players that books during that era were intentionally written with clan bias, so it is possible that one or even both portrayals are intentionally incorrect.

Other supposed contradictions are actually not contradictions, and can be explained in a more detailed analysis. These come up fairly often when a player's image of a favorite character or clan is not the same as a canon portrayal—the player will often perceive that to be a "contradiction" when in fact the portrayal is well-supported by previous history.

If a contradiction of an important detail comes up and it was an error on our part, we just admit it, and declare one or the other contradictory detail to be a mistake.

MS: *Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions Fred.*

FW: You're welcome!

Interview conducted in January 2008.

Winter Court in your Game

Winter – the time of the year in which Rokugan settles down and those samurai lucky (or cursed) enough are joining one of the many winter courts throughout the land. Although this institution is one of the particular things that make the setting of Legend of the Five Rings unique, its use as a source or setting for adventures can be a daunting prospect for the Gamemaster. The following article is meant to help GMs include their players' characters into the (social) web of a winter court season and details the challenges it has in store for them.

“Whose chop is that on the invitation?” – The host

Bayushi Saburo looked at the woods surrounding his family's estate with a thoughtful expression. “What troubles your mind, my lord?”

Turning to his wife Yukimiko, he smiled, his eyes glowing with dark humor.

“A messenger has arrived, delivering me a letter from Ikoma Hariku.”

It was not for the cold that Yukimiko shivered when she asked: “A challenge?”

“No...or yes, maybe it was.” Saburo chuckled. “The man who has killed my elder brothers invites me to his winter court.”

“You will not go, will you?”

Saburo chuckled again. “Who am I to refuse a man like Hariku? Besides, I am curious as to his intentions. Let the servants prepare my palanquin.”

The host of a winter court provides his guests with food and drink, lodging and entertainment. He is also responsible for their safety and well-being. But who is this host? A Hida-daimyo who – against all stereotypes – looks forward his winter court because he sees it as a well-earned amusement during the winter and a nice diversion from his bloody duties? Or a bored Kakita who has attended far too many winter courts to find anything good or entertaining about them? The motives of the host, as well as his (or his representatives') social and organizational skills and his resources will largely affect the nature of the court. For instance, does the host see his court as a step in his ascent to more political power, or does he think of it as a forum where creativity, arts and crafts are discussed? In the first case many diplomats

and politically powerful individuals will be invited, in the latter many artists and sages will be present.

So why are the characters there in the first place? Did the host personally invite them? Why? If not, who else did invite them? Maybe the purpose of the invitation itself provides the first adventure – this way the characters can earn an invitation through their deeds, either directly from their host, in which case they may also have earned his trust, or from their lord, who uses his connections to bring about their invitation. The opposite can also be true: maybe an enemy wants the characters to fall victim to the deadly social games at a certain Bayushi court? Or perhaps a Hida daimyo is displeased about something said by one of his bushi, and thinks he should cool his tongue far from the Wall among pretty Cranes? The third possibility is that they are there on a specific mission. It could be a simple diplomatic representation sent to negotiate a peace agreement or maintain good terms between parties, or more underhanded tasks such as espionage (see below), or an infiltration of a castle to prepare an attack the next year.

Among the many possible type of host, there is an option that deserves special attention: when the host is the daimyo (or at least a superior) of the PCs. This changes their situation dramatically as they are no longer simple guests, but representatives of their lord. They are now also responsible for their lord's guests' well-being. Plots which harm one of those guests are a direct attack on their lord's interests! And problems, which the host would have tried to hide from them (had they be simple guests) to avoid a loss of face, will become their problems. Their discretion is no more a favor they do – it is expected and failure in this can easily lead to dishonor or death. On the other hand, the reward for doing one's duty in such a situation may be far higher than usual, as the face of the PCs superior is directly at stake. There is no glory to gain by hiding and clearing up a crime discreetly but their lord himself will remember it well...

Choosing a host for his campaign presents the Gamemaster with a good opportunity to play with stereotypes, as the examples above show. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that Rokugan is a land of tradition and protocol. Even though the Kakita daimyo does not enjoy his winter court, he would not let the guests be poorly fed or ill-treated. The Crane have a thousand years of experience with these events and can easily outshine similar courts of other clans. But maybe the guests of the Hida daimyo will feel better treated regardless of the relatively clumsy efforts to amuse them, because they might sense that he cares.

"I love the Shadowlands at sunset." - The location

The Lion lands were a boring place. Endless fields, some villages, castles (absolutely dull and uncomfortable!) and training grounds. Oh, yes! Trainings grounds! And even more training grounds! No Lion samurai, no matter where he went in his clan's territory would ever miss a training session.

Isawa Kumiko sighed and sank back into her palanquin. She decided that whoever her husband would be, after this winter court he surely would be no Lion. To live in such a boring, unexciting, mind-numbing place would be far more than she could bear.

Again the young woman sighed and opened the scroll on which her father had written what he knew about Hariku-sama's lands. A large estate surrounded by woods, a big temple of Bishamon to the west, two villages – one in the north and one in the east. But he had also marked a place in the hills south of the estate. A mark without a comment... what would that be?

The host himself determines the location of the winter court. But such a court is more than just a castle in some Bayushi or Shinjo province. First of all the geographic and climatic conditions influence the possibilities for the characters and NPCs alike. If one is locked in the snowy mountains of the Dragon he cannot receive messages telling him whether his wife has given birth to a son or a daughter. If the court is located in the Crab provinces, long rides or hunts are maybe a very dangerous undertaking.

Another point is the area surrounding the castle. Is it looming above a big city? Or is it located in the deepest wilderness? How easy is it to reach? How is it supported? A castle in the northern part of the Phoenix-territory which is difficult to reach and without a settlement near it can get into serious trouble if some misfortune happens to its food stores.

Are there dangerous or interesting places near the court? Villages, tea houses, forgotten shrines, vast caves, old battlefields full of mourning ghosts? Even the most bookish shugenja or the softest courtier would go mad if he has to be inside a castle for several months without the possibility to get some "fresh air", not to mention the bushi.

"Oh my God! He carries a red fan!" - Description and details

"Indeed! How interesting!" It took a very serious effort to look amused and interested as the Matsu continued to 'entertain' her with a new piece from his seemingly never-ebbing hoard of war stories. Inwardly Doji Naoko sighed and wished the evening would be over. The thought made her smile more genuine. She longed for it to be over. Then she saw what she was waiting for. Hariku. He looked around and then came straight for her.

"Ah, Doji-san, I see Minoru-san is again pretending to be worthy of Hida himself", he teased with a smile, "Because you are so taken with his stories, I suppose we should continue our talk about Ikoma Kenshin and his last Noh-play tomorrow morning in the garden?"

Naoko bowed. "Of course, Ikoma-sama. I will be honored."

Her smile deepened as Hariku ambled away. This night, the hour of Hida, in the garden...

Winter court is – above all else – a very subtle setting. That is why it is important to evoke all the characters' senses in the description and to describe details. Small gestures, the choice of attire or references to old poems often transport messages or meanings (Why does Isawa Renshi, who always carries a white fan, today carry a red one?).

Players who are more used to fights and action will have to learn to pay attention to such "descriptive stuff". A possibility to show these players the importance of attention and perception is to let some NPC fail in front of the characters because he missed a hint. For example: it is widely known that Hida Akira is a loud and talkative person but that this changes when he gets angry; the calmer he becomes the angrier he is. Now, a certain Bayushi, who sits next to him at a banquet, begins a conversation about something seemingly rather innocent. He talks and talks and Akira becomes calmer and calmer – until the moment in which Akira interrupts the Bayushi with a gesture and says (in a very calm voice, of course): "Very well, Bayushi-san, I accept your challenge. My sword!" Not to stop talking at the right moment can get one into serious trouble, therefore recognizing the moment to hold one's tongue can save lives (And – on a side-note – the perceptive player may ask: "If the topic was so innocent, why did Hida Akira get angry?").

"What was his name? Kirada? Kitada? Ki...?" - NPCs

Daidoji Gangoro growled. These Lion-servants appeared to be very loyal...or at least not as cheap as servants of other clans. Buying their indiscretion was not an easy undertaking. If things remained this way he would be out of money before the end of the month. There were only two names of servants on his list who would maybe accept a bribe.

Daigoro was a supervisor over the other attendants. A man too clever and too brave for a servant, it was said.

Hanako, the 'handmaiden' of Matsu Minoru, was a thirty years old hag as tough as a boar. Maybe she would be cheaper?

If not, Gangoro would have to look for more money. Alas, where to get it? He knew that Bayushi Saburo was known as an enemy of the host. It was surely not impossible to use this fact...

NPCs are the lifeblood of every campaign and every adventure. But in a winter court they are even more important. They are the challenges and adventures the

characters have to face during the next months; not some oni or cursed house or battle – they, the NPCs.

Before any ideas for plots or adventures are written down it is necessary to decide who will be present at the court. This does not mean that every NPC has to be fleshed out and is given game statistics. Instead they need three things: a motivation, a description and an emotional reaction of the players.

A good motivation is a key element for any character or NPC. It can be as specific as a clearly defined goal ("kill Shosuro Shingen") or a rather broad motivation ("get glory and become important"). It is the element that will help decide an NPCs actions or reactions towards the characters, because every behavior is driven by...well, a motivation.

The description does not need to be complete; the players will never remember every detail. But something remarkable, like a certain habit, his voice or something in his appearance will help the players remember him. There may be many Akodo at this winter court but only one has this pink fan in his obi...

The emotional reaction will help the players remember the NPC and will guide their characters' actions regarding him. In addition it will make his actions or the misfortunes that may befall him important to the players, so that they will be motivated to act on his behalf or against him. If they "really hate this guy" they will love it to conspire against him, if they give him a nickname they will remember him, if they like him, his betrayal will have a real impact on them.

"What do we do tonight, Paneki-sama?" – Plots

Impossible! Nobody, really nobody, wanted to go out with her to have a look at the place that was marked on the map. Kumiko sighed. It seemed as if she had to...be a little bit more creative about her undertaking.

Smiling she sat down and took a cup of tea. While she relaxed she thought of Akiko, her servant, who was already with the other servants to tell them about those mocking comments of Matsu Minoru about the samurai of the other Clans and their hunting skills. Of course these words would reach the other servants' masters and they would propose a hunt, for the most innocent reasons...of course...just...for sport.

And...where to hunt? That part would fall to Bayushi Saburo, although she did not understand why he had agreed to help her. He would propose the hunt to take place in the south of the estate...

There is one thing to say about plots: to have no plot is the best plot at all.

This does not mean that any main plots of a campaign should be abandoned, but that the courtly situation itself will create plots and adventures. If an NPC has a goal he will act to achieve it; the characters may recognize these actions and wonder what purpose is behind them – and so there is a plot! If the characters, on the other

hand, want to achieve something they will have to act and NPCs may move to help or to hinder them – another plot is underway!

Sometimes it may be interesting to throw some NPC actions at the characters (and their players) and let them guess what is behind them. The players' speculations can be used as course of action for the NPC in question, so that they generate their own adventure without even knowing it. So it is of outmost importance for a GM to listen to his players' discussions and thoughts. They may...inspire him. And by doing so, they create the plot which is laid before them.

As for specific themes, a winter court allows a broad range of adventures. Several will be outlined here:

Contests

The setup for a contest is easy: name a skill which will define the nature of the contest. These contests – be it competitions in poetry, magic, swordplay or ikebana – are a stage on which the participants gain or lose prestige. That is why certain contestants may wish to cheat or to blackmail in order to be victorious – or why do you think the Kakita master-poet threw his performance?

An important point to prevent those contests from becoming simple (and boring) dice-roll-performances is to make them risky for the players who participate. To do so it is not necessary to threaten the lives of the characters but give them something to gain (if they win) and to lose (if they fail). If a rival approaches the PC shortly before a contest and proposes a little bet (which may have the woman they both want as a prize...for example) then things become interesting. Or let us suppose the PCs have to win the poetry-contest because a bet of their lord – who will certainly lose face if they fail. If the prize is high enough even the most honorable Lion will question the worth of his personal honor...

Crime

At any place, where men gather there is crime. Nonetheless this is a very sensitive topic, because the host will lose face if too many or too serious crimes occur during his winter court. That is why such an incident should be handled discreetly by the PCs. In addition, there has to be a reason why the host involves them. Maybe they have a reputation for handling such things, or the host has reason to trust them? Also, the graveness of the crime has to be kept in mind: was it just a child ruining a prized ikebana by stealing a silken flower from it, or was a body found near the castle?

Espionage

It is a crime and considered dishonorable. Nonetheless every Clan does it. And what would be the best opportunity to have a look into other clans' secrets (or even their daily affairs) if not a court, to which one is officially invited? Such a mission – given to samurai before his departure to the winter court – can be as simple as 'how many guards are in Shiro Shiba?' or a difficult as 'who is the real father of the second son of your host?'

In nearly every castle one will find an archive with lots of interesting information; examples are historic events

('What do the Asako believe about our involvement in battle XY?'), lineages ('Is Lion-daimyo A really akin with Phoenix-daimyo B?') or simple tax records. The trick is to get in...

Games

Winter can be very boring. That is why people at winter court invent and play many games to kill an evening or a whole day. A common example would be a paper chase – a riddle that has to be solved, for which purpose hints for the solution are hidden in different parts of the castle. A more indigenous game would be a hunt, on which many complications can occur (a winter storm, bandits or an abandoned shrine alone in the deepest part of the woods).

Games, like contests, carry the opportunity to be recognized or humiliated (depending on the severity of the game, of course). Also, they are an excellent distraction for other peoples' activities – maybe the Scorpion courtier brought forth the idea for the paper chase so that he can investigate – unintentionally of course! – some interesting parts of the castle. Or the Hida refuses to "play such a wimpy game" but secretly uses the distraction to meet his lover...

Love and affairs

There is no place where (dis)advantages like 'Lechery' or 'Dangerous Beauty' hurt more than in a winter court. And to engage in affairs or love stories can be as interesting as any political battle – and even more deadly, since it is not "only about business". People will go to great lengths to protect those they love or to hinder others from laying their hands on them. In the name of love, a person, who is otherwise completely reasonable, would lie, cheat and even kill. That is why one can manipulate others by their feelings for a man or woman. That is why one should really think carefully if the refusal of the advances of this or that powerful lord is a good idea.

On the social stage, having affairs – or even to be said to have affairs – will have a great impact on the involved characters prestige and standing. Some will look down on such an individual while others will appreciate such 'conquests'. Therefore affairs and sex (or only rumors about it) can be used to destroy or blackmail someone ("Well, Lord Akihito, I wonder what your wife's family will have to say about this child of yours born by a geisha..."). This is the reason why 'Lechery' is a disadvantage while 'Dangerous Beauty' can become one...

War

Winter is the time of peace (the Khan apparently did not get the memo). But even if samurai usually do not go to war in winter, this does not have to be true for other enemies. Shadowland beasts do not care if it is winter or not, and Yobanjin tribes may feel the need to pillage food in the northern Phoenix-lands because of the harsh winter.

The occurrence of a war can offer a very dramatic twist in any winter court campaign, but just like in the case of crime, it has to be remembered that it is the host's duty to protect his guests. Therefore, he needs a very good reason

to involve the characters in the fighting instead of evacuating them – if he has the choice. On the other hand, if the characters offer their assistance too lightly they will insult him by implying that he is not able to protect them, so the situation has to be either very desperate ("This section of the Wall has collapsed and we need EVERY bushi and shugenja at the breach!") or seemingly not important at all ("I heard there are some Yobanjin out there. Who wants to go hunting with me? They are cleverer than boars but not as tough.").

"What do you mean – the Emperor himself?" – The kind of court

Ikoma Hariku looked at the new dawn and was quite pleased with himself. His court during the winter had been a real success. Even those...unpleasant events that involved the Bayushi and that Daidoji had been solved to his complete satisfaction. The little duel that had killed that filthy spy in exchange for some favors and a peace with Saburo was the best conceivable outcome. Nobody would miss a bushi of such low rank, and so even Naoko-chan would get no trouble at all – at least he hoped so.

The kind of stage a PC attends to has serious impact on the stories that can be told there. In other words, one would meet people and experience problems according to the type of court one is invited to. The kinds of court and their impact on the stories told there will be handled in the following lines. Every section contains a brief outline of how one is invited there and what special challenges or dangers are waiting there for the PCs.

Imperial Court

Even if a character has killed hundreds of oni and destroyed dozens of Bloodspeaker cults throughout the Empire he would be invited only if someone there – that is, someone important enough to set his name on the guest list – has heard of him. The same is true for every winter court but it is far more difficult to be recognized by those entangled in the web unto politics in the Imperial Court than any other daimyo or similar personage. The Imperial Court is a little world for itself and so, even the greatest hero the Empire has ever seen may go unnoticed there. Remember: there are many powerful and/or prominent figures at this court and the PCs may find themselves as the least important ones. The oni of the Shadowlands, for example, are far away, so, having slain hundreds of them means nothing to a decadent Otomo courtier and his political friends. This will change if he can use the PCs' reputation for his own good – then of course their 'glorious deeds' will become very important.

Being unrecognized may be a very merciful fate for the PCs. Why is that? Because a simple faux pas – and because of the complex and nearly never-ending protocol in an Imperial Court such a mistake can happen even to most experienced courtier – in front of the Emperor shames that character's whole Clan, and there is only one foolproof method to spare his Clan the shame... The PCs at an Imperial Court will be regarded as representatives of their Clans – outshining even ambassadors of their

Clan at lesser courts, although they might not even have such status. That may generate envy, which may cause someone to try to sabotage the PCs efforts. That brings a huge responsibility – after all, do they want their Clan to be deprived of all trade-advantages on the sea because the Emperor was displeased with the way they treated his most beloved peacock? What if the girl the Doji just seduced and bedded was the chancellor's niece? What if the Shogun himself begins to feel a grudge against all Scorpions because one of them killed his closest friend in a duel?

Courts of the Clan Champions

In this kind of court the same rules apply as in the Imperial one. But the stakes are not as high, and the probability of going unnoticed is far lower. Also, the variability of guests will be somewhat smaller, depending on the state of political affairs and the fact that one will mostly invite his friends. So, how did the PCs become friends of that Clan? And if they are not friends why were they invited – perhaps to make an example on them? Clan champions will invite those they have business with and the PCs should hope that it is a positive one for no 'neutral' Emperor is there to make sure all things resolve in a civil manner.

Again, the PCs are going to be seen as representatives of their Clans, and if their Clans care about the relationship with the host's Clan, every serious mistake will result in the same fate as in the Imperial Court. On the other hand, they may have the chance to influence the relationship between their Clan and the one who invited them. They may even get the ear of that clan's champion! If a Crab PC ever thought about a 'Pincer Alliance' between Crab, Scorpion and Mantis he can make the first step towards it in the Scorpion champion's winter court...

Family Courts

A family daimyo might have a more relaxed view about whom to invite to his winter court. Of course, politics will have their share of the court's time, but a family's politics will rarely differ from the Clan champion's politics. Nonetheless it should be kept in mind that at this level of affairs the friendship or the enmity of a whole family can be won...

Courts of the Minor Clans

In regard to stories and adventures, the courts of the minor clans are similar to the courts of the Great Clan champions'. While they are smaller, and the protocol may be less important, events on this court influence relationships between whole Clans, even if one of these Clans is 'only' a Minor one.

Provincial Courts

These courts are, in some ways, the easiest. One will find guests of various kinds there, just as the host wished as he organized his court. The whole 'one's clan representative'-thing is a lot more relaxed here. Protocol may become less important, and the stories will focus on the more human things. For a low-ranking samurai this may be a good place to catch a bride. On the other hand, the

guests will be far more diverse than in a family or a Clan-champion court as the host is not (as tightly) bound by his Clans' politics, although he cannot completely ignore it. Another important point is the importance of the PCs. At the Imperial Court (and most assuredly the court of Clan champions and families) they will melt into the mass of guests – a brave retainer who has served his lord on countless occasions will receive no recognition in such a large court, but in small courts, where the guests are more carefully chosen (such as the latter two courts) he may be of the most honored and recognized guests – the star of the court. But as flattering as this may be, he should be always aware that not every friendly attention is a sign of friendly intention...

"Look. Over there. That is what I meant." – Example

This small example describes a court, its host and several NPCs according to the guidelines that were given in the previous sections. This is a rough outline, as it can be used at the start of a winter court campaign. Remember that improvisation is the key element of a living winter court. Therefore plot-ideas should be changed or left out if it seems fun to do so. The best plots are those which are brought on by the players (often without their knowledge).

Ikoma Hariku's winter court

Ikoma Hariku is a minor daimyo in the Ikoma lands, who is quickly climbing the social echelon. This winter court is his latest scheme to help him gain even more influence. To do so, making peace with Bayushi Saburo, a long time enemy, would go a long way. That is why, against all expectations, Saburo was invited.

Hariku's holdings are dull at best - at least at the first glance. He has enlarged his castle so that it is indeed well prepared to offer his guests comfortable lodgings. Indeed the resources used for this enlargement were originally allocated to increase the size of his ashigaru-contingent, something that his superiors had better never find out...

His lands comprise several small villages, two of them less than a day walk away. These villages make their living farming and logging timber from the forests in Hariku's domain. The Elder of one the villages knows about the would-be increase of the ashigaru-contingent, and that its funds were averted by Hariku's actions. As he had already lost two sons to the wars of the Lion he is grateful that his third son was spared this fate. For this reason he is absolutely loyal to Hariku.

South of the castle there is a hill. There is nothing unusual about it, aside from some rumors of strange sounds heard at night. In fact, this hill is the grave of a lord who ruled these lands before the nine Kami fell to earth, and long forgotten. But he is not as dead as he should be...

Guests

Doji Naoko (Doji Courtier): A beautiful maiden of fragile figure with eyes as blue as the sea and long black

hair. She has a talent to listen to people, and is often quite evasive in conversation. She is first and foremost here to watch over the Crane Clan's interests but also to share time with her lover, Hariku.

Daidoji Gangoro (Daidoji Harrier): A tall and muscular man with the quiet self-esteem of a bushi who has seen his share of combat and is no more afraid of anything. He talks a lot, but only after some bottles of sake. He is posing as Naoko's yojimbo but he is really here on a spying mission to investigate the rumors the Crane heard that Hariku may have fathered a peasant child.

Bayushi Saburo (Bayushi Courtier): A quiet and seemingly thoughtful man. His long, dark brown hair usually throws shadows over his delicate features. He is here to represent the interests of the Scorpion...and because he is a very curious person. He has no clue about Hariku's intentions and will try to reveal any plot made by the host to kill him (since his and Hariku's family have been enemies for three generations) – which will be very difficult since no such plot exists.

Isawa Kumiko (Isawa Shugenja): A cute, but spoiled rich girl who is only looking to net herself a high ranking husband. She has some annoying habits, like meddling in the affairs of others or getting angry when her needs are not met in time.

Otomo Sekawa (Otomo Courtier): A big, charming man, with the appearance of everybody's beloved grandfather. Sekawa is Hariku's big gamble. If his plans for this winter court go smoothly, he'll come off looking sharp and smelling like a rose. That is why Sekawa is here: to witness Hariku's flawless Winter Court and report on it to the rest of the Imperial families. Well, that is Hariku's reason for Sekawa being here. Hariku would be surprised to hear that Sekawa has fallen in disfavor and will try nearly anything to get back to his old status...

Akodo Himitsu (Akodo Scout): A small, but muscular man with a big mustache and cold black eyes. The fact that Hariku is quickly climbing the social ladder has both impressed and worried some among his superiors. Himitsu has been sent by one of those people to keep tabs on Hariku. He is a little bit frustrated about his current position because he thinks of it as a waste of time.

Utaku Konomi (Utaku Battle Maiden): A beautiful but somewhat shy woman with hair as black as a raven's feathers and large green eyes. Her shyness vanishes whenever she comes into the open, has to ride a horse or is doing combat-practice. With a bokken in her hand others may find her very talkative. Hariku's scorn for the Unicorn Clan is well known, and in order for him to look good this winter, somebody must look bad. Konomi is the designated victim. She is out of her element, and Hariku hopes she will make some sort of social faux pas, either on her own or by being provoked by one of the multitude of small subtle slights Hariku intends to make, thus making a fool of her and, by extension, the whole Unicorn Clan...

Yasuki Osho (Yasuki Courtier): A slim man with a nervous appearance and a scar on his left cheek. Osho is an old friend of Hariku and he invited him both as a favor he owed the Yasuki and so he could have a guaran-

teed ally to cover his back this winter court. Osho knows about his friend's plans for Bayushi Saburo and will try to act as a middleman between the distrustful Scorpion and his Lion friend.

Matsu Minoru (Matsu Berserker): Minoru is a rock-like man, strong and immovable – in more than one way. He is also the captain of Hariku's guard and, especially after some drinks, a friendly and outgoing person who likes to talk (others would say brag) a lot about his achievements in combat. He has developed an interest in Utaku Konomi, but has already recognized what her purpose in Hariku's court is, for he is not as simple-minded as one might think. He is torn between his loyalty to his lord and his respect (or maybe love?) for Konomi.

Plots

Love and jealousy: Hearing the rumors that Naoko may be Hariku's secret lover, Kumiko will develop a seething jealousy toward her. She will try her hardest to undermine Naoko's job, maybe even going as far as convincing any PC currently courting her to try and provoke a duel with Naoko's yojimbo.

The mysterious Dragon: A few days after the last guest arrived, a mysterious Mirumoto Samurai-ko arrives at Hariku's court claiming she was invited. Although Hariku has no memories of having ever sent an invitation to the Dragon Clan, sure enough, this mysterious samurai-ko bears an official invitation signed by Hariku and bearing his personal chop. This Dragon is a total mystery to everyone. She seems to take sides and make alliances at random, often switching sides the very next day... What could she really be after?

The hunt: Isawa Kumiko, in her desire to explore a site marked on her map of Hariku's holdings, spread rumors about some mocking comments of Matsu Minoru about the samurai of other clans and their hunting skills. Her goal is to give Bayushi Saburo, who has agreed to help her, a cause to propose a hunt in the southern parts of Hariku's province where the place is marked on her map...

Distant love: Matsu Minoru decides to protect Utaku Konomi from dishonoring herself in his lord's court. As he cannot do so directly he approaches (one of) the PCs and asks for help. This is a very difficult undertaking because Konomi is completely out of her element and does not trust anyone in the Lion's winter court. She knows she has no allies and is therefore distrustful against any "help" or "advice". The matter becomes worse as Naoko, to do Hariku a favor, begins to pick on the battle maiden...

Revenge or no revenge: Yasuki Osho has tried his best to convince Bayushi Saburo of Hariku's good intentions. But as his friendship to Hariku is known he needs help to convince the Scorpion... Meanwhile Saburo faces the choice to come to an agreement with Hariku and end this conflict or help Daidoji Gangoro in his espionage in Hariku's court.

And so on... Let your imagination go wild.

Shosuro Shingen & Kalajel

How to Use the Winter Court Trilogy

No books better fit the Imperial theme of this issue of *Musha Shugyo* than the three Winter Court books (*Kyuden Seppun*, *Kyuden Kakita*, and *Kyuden Asako*). Unfortunately, the L5R Third Edition game is set many years after the events depicted in this trilogy, and the rules presented then are often different from the latest ruleset. Still, there are ideas and information to harvest from these books and this article will introduce new gamemasters and players to them.

Kyuden Seppun

Kyuden Seppun was the first of the three Winter Court books, meant to detail both Rokugani culture, the Imperial families and to advance the timeline of the pre-Scorpion Clan Coup metaplot. While clearly outdated in this regard, the books are still the premiere source of information on the imperial families, even considering more recent releases. The question still remains whether a book written two editions ago (and taking place over 45 years before the current timeline) is useful today and how so?

Obviously, my answer to those questions is a yes on both counts, regardless whether you intend to use the current timeline or not.

Overview

Kyuden Seppun is divided into four chapters, although there does not really seem to be any thematic distinction among them, even after taking into account the period of the day they are named after (there is no reason why weddings are discussed in the Night section while calendar is discussed in the Afternoon, separating it from the astrology section).

Interspersed among them is the tale of Bayushi Kachiko and Doji Hoturi. It is competent fiction, but hardly GM inspiring except for the death of Phoenix Champion Shiba Burisagi, and, with some caution, the tensions between the protagonists and their parents. Still, considering the rank of those involved this is hardly material to involve starting or low status PCs.

This is in fact one of the weakest aspects of the Winter Court books. The average-status PC has absolutely no business in the Emperor's Winter Court. Fortunately "Emperor" can be replaced with "Provincial Daimyo", and the remaining details can be simply lifted, which makes most plots usable by any party regardless of their influence.

Also interspersed among the chapter there are several barebones NPCs, each with adventure hooks attached.

All these can be used independently of the timeline even though Yogo Resai makes use of material from Way of the Dragon and Asahina Hanuko is said to be the daughter of Asahina Tomo.

At the back of the book there is also a map of Kyuden Seppun, a map that does not have to be specifically used to represent Kyuden Seppun. Floor plans of Rokugani buildings are sorely missing from recent books.

The first chapter, Dawn, deals with the history of the Imperial families, gives a brief overview of the Minor clans, details the formation of vassal families, and gives some information on religion, economy and etiquette. The section on economics has a few goofy things, such as the Emperor actually receiving all the rice farmed in Rokugan from the clans and then issuing Koku for them to redeem rice. While this seems a good way to exert imperial power over the clans, it implies some very impressive logistics that are not practical at all, and is an assumption that is completely shattered by the fact that all clans mint their own Koku (not to mention the Gentry rules or even the following section on the vassal families). It also includes stipend rules for samurai characters that are now completely outdated.

The meat of this chapter is the detailed description of the Imperial families, the Miya in particular. All are evocative, with interesting fiction backing them up, although some information seems to be a bit shoehorned at times (for example: information on the Imperial Court and Imperial advisor is separated with the Imperial advisors being detailed in the middle of the Hantei family write up, i.e. see my problem above with the lack of thematic distinction in the chapters), but the Miya do come alive which makes it a greater shame that they weren't detailed mechanically as well. They make outstanding patrons for any PC party and the Imperial Blessing is a great alternative for the traditional Magistrate setup. The Imperial Blessing is a combination of fund and workforce that is bestowed once a year to help rebuild an area of the Empire that was the most afflicted (whether through war, disease, natural disaster...). It is updated as a Path in the Four Winds book.

The second chapter, Afternoon, is about cultural information, in particular concerning law, the calendar, and court. However it also includes the fact that ancestor testimony obtained by the Kitsu is allowable (if disputed by non-Lion), which goes against current canon. It also includes the definitive incarnation of the Rokugani calendar which I really do not like (Fu-Leng as a month, 28 day months with four weeks each). This is made worse by the fact that in the Night chapter, there is a mention about the astrological significance of the number 60. I

would really like to know why is 60 so significant considering that the Rokugani do not use a lunisolar calendar of alternating 29 and 30 day months with leap months added every 3 years. Sometimes less is more...

The third chapter, Night, includes information on weddings, retirement, and astrology, but the largest section is devoted for the specific events of the 21st year of Hantei XXXVIII, and a, now outdated, timeline of the Empire.

The final chapter deals with mechanical information, the Otomo Courtier and Seppun Bushi schools, a few new skills and, most importantly, a list of Winter Court NPCs, including the Emperor and Heir themselves.

How to use this book?

There are actually quite a few ways to use Kyuden Seppun. Naturally, for those playing in the Pre-Scorpion timeline the material is usable nearly as is, with only minor adjustments required if your PCs are not high enough status to belong in an Imperial Winter Court. But even for those playing in different periods or alternate timelines there is a lot that can be mined for ideas.

The Falcon hook, for example, has enormous potential. For one, it casts the absorption of the Falcon clan into the Crab and the character of Toritaka Genzo in a different light. What if Genzo was actually a betrayer to his family, a puppet of his Kuni allies? Could there be loyalist Toritaka plotting revenge even after 40 years? Would they be hidden among the Crab, hosted by the Unicorn, or living as ronin? It also echoes nicely of the hatred between Hida Tsuru and Shinjo Hanari and who knows if whatever the Falcon intended to offer the Unicorn can still be found in Toritaka lands, unclaimed by the Crab?

The Mujina invasion of Phoenix lands works well, regardless of which clan is actually targeted, and is in no way timeline dependant.

The Ratling hijinks on Daidoji lands are also easy to adapt. They may take place at any moment the Ratling are around, and the Crane Clan is hostile to the Lion (which pretty much covers any date up to 1160 IC). Even if the Nezumi have faced Tomorrow in your campaign, there is the small matter of the Jade Bow. Certainly it lies in some far off and now empty warren, and the Crab certainly would not mind getting their hands on such artifact (and any others misplaced alongside it).

Using the included fiction, the death of Shiba Burisagi may serve as the base for a similarly inspired adventure. Burisagi might be the PCs' lord who is killed by one of the most skilled duelists in court because he, allegedly, tried to molest an innocent maiden.

Even the outdated timeline can be used as a counterpoint to the current timeline. On one hand it possesses more interesting "mythical" qualities which make it more suitable as a base for the Rokugani body of beliefs, but what if the "official" timeline is wrong? What if the Sparrow was really founded in the eighth century?

Finally, the Imperial Blessing is also an excellent way to mix multi-clan characters in the same party traveling around Rokugan, a good alternative to the typical magis-

trate campaign. The group requires different skills, with an emphasis on healing and engineering, but bushi will have their place as bodyguards or all-purpose muscle, and leadership types will also be required.

Kyuden Kakita

Kyuden Kakita is the second book in the Winter Court series, set two years after the first book. No reason is given as to why a year was skipped and what happened at the first Winter Court of the new Hantei in Kyuden Otomo. One of the problems of this book is the fact that most of its information has been reprinted in subsequent books, far more so than any other Winter Court book, but there is still a lot to glean from it.

Overview

As in Kyuden Seppun, the book is divided into four chapters, one for each period of the day, and an epilogue. As in Kyuden Seppun there is no thematic distinction between chapters.

The interspaced fiction is about the poisoning of the Hantei by Kachiko, which makes it even less usable as a plot hook than the fiction in Kyuden Seppun. However, it further develops the animosity between Satoshi and his father, already exposed in Kyuden Seppun. It also details the first moves in Kisada's winter offensive to take the throne, moving through the former Scorpion provinces taking out the Imperial Legions stationed therein. This works a lot better as a potential plot hook, as the only thing required to involve the PCs is that they are either part of the Imperial Legions, or Crab samurai (if following canon) assigned to the offensive.

The first chapter, Dawn, deals with historical campaigns, and briefly details three periods, the beginning of the Empire, the events surrounding the battle of the White Stag, and the return of the Unicorn. It also includes a section on natural disasters. Finally, it further details the Miya. Strangely, the relationship between the Otomo and Miya is retconned into being strained without much explanation (there are reasons why they could easily be strained, but none is really offered, other than it is just how it is). Finally, there is a section on ronin.

The second chapter, Afternoon, starts with the descriptions of the typical day-to-day life of several character-types, including eta. I would have liked to see Farmers and Fishermen included as well, but this gives a good perspective on how the typical Rokugani spends his day, and may aid GMs create lively NPCs. It is followed by a short section describing apprenticeships in Rokugan. Despite the title of the section, there is no actual word on the gempukku ceremony. Next, there is a mixed bag of cultural information, from armor to sake, swords to fans, which concludes the chapter.

The third Chapter, Night, details visiting customs and strangely ends up in another discussion about court and court chamber (with a rather blatant editing error, this section being repeated). It is followed by some generic courtier stats for the Crane, Lion and Unicorn NPCs, and incomplete stat blocks for Crab, Dragon and Phoenix NPCs with agendas to carry out at court. This section

Kyuden Asako

Kyuden Asako was the last of the Winter Court books, and the only one to use Second Edition rules. At 82 pages it was also significantly slimmer than the previous books, although the slightly more efficient layout may make up for that.

At a first glance, this may very well be the best Winter Court book to use as an inspiration for adventures, though at the cost of far less interesting cultural information.

Overview

As with the previous two books, it is again divided in Dawn, Afternoon, and Night chapters. Just like the previous books there is absolutely no thematic meaning in this division.

The first chapter, Dawn, starts off by detailing the Imperial Legions. It is a pretty good section; the only thing that seems odd is the unusually high number of ashigaru in regards to the total population of the Empire. That number probably also includes all the levies that would be raised if the Empire were to face a massive defensive war against a foreign invader. Since the Shogun's role is yet to be defined (which is odd as the Role of Shogun is one of the major rewards in the Race for the Throne), the information within can also be considered up to date and used nearly as is. After the information on the Legions, the relation between the Seppun and the Phoenix is detailed, and the already hinted role of the Seppun as religious caretakers is explained, introducing the Seppun Shugenja Academy near Shiro Shiba, and the first mention of the Hidden Guard. This section also includes a small update on the status of the Seppun following the Scorpion Clan Coup.

This chapter also introduces the Shiba Tejina, with a detailed story of their formation. This is followed by Yobanjin equipment. Now, while I can understand why the writers decided to detail the Tejina in a book called Kyuden Asako, I'm still puzzled on why they decided to present some Yobanjin gear with nearly no cultural information on the Yobanjin themselves. That's nearly three pages wasted.

The chapter ends with some general information on castles. While decent, it offers very little that even a novice GM could not come up with himself. It does have the merit of introducing the former Kaiu vassals Anou, now part of the Miya family.

At this point I have to make a small revelation: I have saved the best for last. Nested right between the Tejina and Yobanjin sections, a few historical figures are presented. Each one has a small bio, and more importantly, every single one of them has a timeline-independent adventure hook (although one of them does have ties to the Badger Clan crisis of 1126 IC).

Afternoon, the second chapter, begins by giving some small detail on the gempukku traditions of the different clans. It is good enough, but it feels far too short, and without access to the "Way of" series, it is nearly useless as well.

is followed by information on artisans and court entertainments, including an application of the Iaijutsu duel rules to simulate art competitions, as well as kemari, the Bowmen's Wager (the most prestigious archery contest in Rokugan), the Devil Chase for shugenja, and a few other contests. The next section is a discussion on ghosts, including the first introduction of the Spirit Realms in its current form, and on the Taint. Some "astrological events" (ie Omens) and a round-up of court objectives for the Great Clans, as well a lengthy essay on the hiding Scorpion are also offered. Finally, there is a brief overview of the first ten Hantei emperors, and of the imperial families and some of their members. Also in this section appears for the first time the "revised" history of the Empire that tries to get rid of inconsistencies and is the basis of the current, official, timeline, as well as a summary of Rokugan's most famous battles up to the Scorpion Clan Coup.

The final chapter, following the series' conventions, is the mechanics chapter, including the Miya School, the Emerald Magistrate School (still a primitive form of advanced school at this point), some new advantages and disadvantages, new skills, and, naturally, full stats for a few Imperial NPCs and Imperial Nemuranai. Also described in this section are the effects the Scorpion Clan Coup had on Otosan Uchi. This is interesting material, but I do not know why it had to be reprinted here.

How to use this book?

Overall, I do believe Kyuden Kakita to be far less useful for a GM than Kyuden Seppun. It suffers from being a bit of a kitchen sink. Anything and everything goes in it. Even the provided PC templates are not that interesting to be used as a source of hooks for adventure (the real way this kind of templates have been used more often than not).

The information on the Miya is great, and along with Kyuden Seppun and Time of the Void it could provide resources for an extended campaign featuring Satoshi as the main villain. This could be further facilitated with Code of Bushido, as it introduces PCs to Koan, and can leave one of them engaged to a high ranking lady of the Otomo, and thus close to Imperial affairs. Either one provides easy access to Yoto, and The PCs may become major pieces in the face off between him and his son.

Using Kyuden Kakita, along with Kyuden Asako and Time of the Void will likewise be enough create a campaign centered on Kisada's march against the Hantei.

The several contests in the Night chapter also provide interesting side-adventures for any character to engage in, be it in court or elsewhere. The "Dancing Elephant" CFS seed presented in this issue of *Musha Shugyo* is directly inspired by the fiction opening this section.

Evidently, it may also be coupled with the Third Edition book to create campaigns in different eras, although both books are somewhat lacking in resources to do it.

The most useful section ends up being the "Typical Day" section that can provide the basis for any NPCs schedule system you want to implement for your stock NPCs.

The following section on magic is far better. It includes some of the etiquette of courtly spellcasting (presenting the first rules for subtle casting as well), and it is the first place where magic is said to have no legal admissibility as judicial proof (directly contradicting Kyuden Seppun). The most useful part of it, however is that it explains the uses that several spells may have, both in general and in the court setting. As most of the spells described are included in the 3rd Edition corebook and work in similar ways, this section can also be used as is. The chapter ends with a short summary of the year's events.

The third Chapter, Night, is mostly about folk magic and superstition. It is interesting to give more flavor to your Rokugan, and to my knowledge it is not presented anywhere else. In the astrology section they try to shoe-horn the use of traditional Chinese astrology with the elemental system Musashi used in the book that provided the inspiration for Legend of the Five Rings. Whether the writers were successful is left, I suppose, to the individual taste of the readers. To me it felt distinctly tacked on and rather superfluous.

Fortunately this chapter manages to end in a very good note. This is in large part to the hilarious essay on the proper use of Sadane and to the excerpts from Subtlety of the Court (although I would argue that these would better fit the first chapter, perhaps in place of the Yobanjin "information").

The last chapter is the mechanical chapter as usual, including NPC stats.

How to use this book?

Well, this may very well be the easiest to use of all the Winter Court books. It has one huge advantage over previous installments in that its fiction is intended to provide a backdrop for adventure from the start. It has the overall picture of the looming Clan War, but it includes the Focus that the murder of Isawa Eizan provides. It would be easy to simply replace the Clan War with anything else you wished and keep the murder as the focus of the adventure. The NPCs provided also have ties that suggest alternate plots, Chang's distrust of Yori and Nakiro, Mashita's debt to Satoshi, Yuritogen's distaste of Satoshi etc...

One other use you can make out of these old books is the adaptation of some of the old rules to new roles in Third Edition. Take the ancestors, for example. They have changed dramatically in Third Edition, however many of them can provide the basis for Paths or Kata.

Seppun Hanako is a good example of this. We know from Emerald Empire that there is a Hanako vassal family to the Seppun. One good look at that Ancestor and it should be fairly obvious that it provides a sound base for a technique, preferably a starting courtier path. Now that we have come to that conclusion, we can take a look at the most similar schools around, the Miya Herald and the Otomo Courtier, which would be the paths of egress of this school. Apparently the Otomo Courtier is the most similar in outlook and focus to what Hanako represented, although it is a little too brutal. So we start by dropping those aspects of the Otomo that are more underhanded. Deceit is replaced by Lore: Heraldry, and Etiquette

(Bureaucracy) becomes Etiquette (Conversation), while the Any High or Bugei skill becomes any High or Lore skill. Finally Investigation is replaced by Storytelling (Oratory/Rethoric). As we do this, we also notice that while the starting Honor of 3.5 is fine, Intelligence would better fit the flavor of the Hanako family for their school.

The outfit can be that of the Otomo Courtier and the only thing left to do is name the "new" technique, in this case the old Seppun Hanako ancestor.

The end result becomes thus:

Hanako Courtier [Courtier]

Technique Rank: 1

Path of Entry: None. This is an Entry-level path.

Path of Egress: Otomo Courtier 1 or Miya Herald 1

Benefit: +1 Intelligence

Honor: 3.5

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation), Defense, Etiquette (Conversation), Lore: Heraldry, Lore: Law, Storytelling (Oratory/Rethoric), any one High or Lore skill.

Outfit: As Otomo Courtier.

TECHNIQUE: THE ARTICLES OF HEAVEN

When making any High skill roll with a skill he does not possess, the Hanako courtier may use the Etiquette skill instead of the missing skill, and is considered to possess it (10s explode, he can make Raises, etc.).

Naturally some of these ancestors are not suitable for any kind of adaptation, while others will need far more tweaking than Seppun Hanako did. In Kyuden Asako you could easily do the same with Kaiu Anou (although the Imperial Blessing path found in Four Winds is a better representation of the Anou family), or with Harmonic Enlightenment, which screams to be used as a Monk Temple Benefit.

Mirumoto Kuro

The Six Ministries

The Imperial bureaucracy is a fairly straightforward affair, given the endless power plays that surround and permeate it. A much sought-after position into one of the six Ministries is often obtained after long negotiations and intricate alliances among the Imperial families. The Ministries are at the heart of the Empire's administration. It is essential for a samurai to know how they function and who is in charge of what to ensure efficiency when he deals with them, and possibly avoid a lethal breach of etiquette.

The Ministry of Finances

The first ministry to have been created was the Ministry of Finance in order to manage the elaborate Rokugani taxing system, which revolves around the production and collecting of rice. To this day, the task of the ministry has not changed and the Imperial Treasurer is still among the most influential ministers of the Court.

The main duty of the Ministry is to determine how much taxes each region must pay to the Emperor each year depending on the quality of the harvesting season, and to make sure all those collected taxes are sent to the capital. It is not rice that is sent to the Emperor, but the equivalent in koku. The officers of the Ministry of Finances are sent to keep an eye on the minting of each clan's koku, to make sure there is no major discrepancy between their supposed value and their actual weight in gold.

The final duty of the ministry is to manage the budget and make sure that everybody on the Emperor's payroll receives his koku stipend. This includes the bureaucrats and each Ministry's budget, the samurai serving in the Imperial legions or as a magistrate, or the members of the Imperial families.

The Ministry of Rites

The Ministry of Rites' importance stems from its overview of all religious and secular rites in the Empire. It is the responsibility of this ministry to make sure that all religious texts in the Empire follow the orthodoxy of both recognized religious sects. The Ministry of Rites overviews any religious demonstration that is to be performed in front of the Emperor.

The secular responsibilities of the Ministry consist of the organization or co-organization of every major tournament in the Empire including the jewels tournaments and the Kumitae. It is the Ministry that chooses the arbiters for the tourneys and makes sure every aspect of it is in perfect accordance with tradition.

Finally, the most important duty of the Ministry is to see to it that the everyday proceedings of the Imperial

court are performed to perfection. They must make sure that the entourage of the Emperor is without fault and that everything goes as planned. The Imperial Advisor is generally named Minister of Rites.

The Ministry of Public Works

The Ministry of Public Works is largely staffed by the Miya family. This Ministry oversees all the big construction projects that affect the Empire as a whole, like the construction and maintenance of the imperial roads or the various imperial palaces.

While the Imperial Blessing is technically also under the authority of this Ministry, all decisions regarding it are traditionally left to the purview of the Miya family Daimyo.

This Ministry is very active in the Imperial Capital as it has the ultimate veto on whether a new construction can be added or not, and where it should be located to ensure that the capital stays the most beautiful city in the Empire while remaining functional. Further, it makes sure that every planned new building respects protocol in regard to the Imperial Palace (meaning that nothing should be taller or more awe-inspiring than the residence of the Son of Heavens).

The Ministry of the Imperial Legions

The Ministry of the Imperial Legions is in charge of the day to day maintenance of the standing army of the Emperor. This task revolves mostly around recruitment, logistics and troop reviewing.

The officers of this ministry are to make sure that every legion is always fully staffed. They check that no shireikan could build an army more loyal to him than to the Emperor by participating in the selection and assignment of every new recruit from among the list of recommendations. For the same reason, they also supervise the annual reshuffle of the commanding officers, when the troops they command are swapped.

The ministry makes sure that all the legions receive proper food, lodging and equipment wherever they are, and adapted to whatever task they are set to accomplish. Finally, officers of the ministry often review the troops to make sure that the standards of discipline and decorum of the legions are high enough to serve as the Emperor's finest. The recent addition of the Shogun title to the Empire had a great impact on this ministry and caused a lot of strife between the Minister of the Imperial Legions and the Shogun.

The Ministry of Justice

This Ministry of Justice is in charge of all matters regarding the law of the Empire. Among their first duties is to ensure that all the specific laws of each provinces and cities of the Empire are in line with Imperial decrees. To do so they study all changes to local laws made by individual governors.

Only the senior officers of this ministry, who are members of the Hashira Horitsu, can actually propose changes to the law. Other officers must relegate themselves to the redactions of theses on appropriate punishments for the criminals.

Since the duties of the Emerald Champion prevent him most of the time from actually reading the reports of his magistrates, it is this Ministry which does that work and only transmits the most pertinent ones to the Emerald Champion. The Ministry has the power to assign magistrates on most cases not of Imperial scope.

The Ministry of Records

The Ministry of Records is one of the most important ministries in the imperial bureaucracy because its purview includes the Imperial census, cartographers,

historians and heralds. Unfortunately, this ministry has historically been among the least funded ones so officers must always do the most out of little, which has never stopped the Voice of the Emperor from making an excellent job with his duties.

The Rokugani society attach the utmost importance to officially recording all the major events of the Empire. This tradition makes this ministry a very busy one. The Imperial cartographers are always traveling to the most remote or dangerous locations in Rokugan, while the heralds are braving even the worst winters to provide every court with the latest announcement or request from the Son of Heavens.

Due to lack of budget, the officers of the Ministry often recruit samurai from the various Clans to help them in their duties, their only compensation being the glory and status associated with helping the illustrious Imperial families.

Malempo

The Imperial Guard

When the tribe of Lady Seppun knelt before the Kami, they swore to always defend and protect Hantei, the first Emperor. And indeed shortly after that, Seppun Toshiko, daughter of Seppun, suggested the establishment of a group of yojimbo, dedicated to protecting the person of the Emperor. Toshiko intended for this force to be established, managed, and controlled by the Seppun, but to her dismay, Hantei decided to open the position to all the samurai of the Empire. On the first celebration of the establishment of Otosan Uchi, he declared a tournament to select his personal champion. Famously, this tournament was won by Kakita, who became the first to hold the position that would some day evolve to be the Emerald Champion.

Many of the Seppun volunteered to work under Kakita and his successors in this position. However, many could not help envy the shugenja of their family, who organized themselves in the Hidden Guard and retained their independence as the spiritual protectors of the Imperial House, while they had to share the duty, that they saw as primarily theirs, with members of clans both Great and Minor, and even lowly ronin.

Opportunity, however, presented itself in the middle of the Second Century, when Doji Hatsuo, the Imperial Personal Champion of his day, along with the Scorpion judge Bayushi Saibankan set out to reform Imperial Law, and ended up creating the Emerald Magistrates. All at once the Personal Champion of the Emperor was charged with a multitude of duties in addition the protection of the person of the Emperor. The Seppun were quick to respond to these changes, and with the help of their Otomo cousins managed to gain dispensation from the Hantei to establish a body to replace what was now the Emerald Magistrates as the primary protectors of the Emperor and his immediate family. The Imperial Guard was created and soon overshadowed the Emerald Magistrates as protectors of the Emperor.

The Seppun Imperial Guard was, at first, an internal Seppun affair, with all of its members recruited from the Seppun and, especially, its entire leadership coming from that family. However, over time, and as the authority of the Imperial Guard broadened, bushi from the other two Imperial Families, the Otomo and the Miya, were also accepted, although none ever climbed up the ranks significantly. In later years, even members of the Great Clans were granted permission to join the ranks of the Imperial Guard, although this was a rare privilege, granted as a sign of respect for that samurai's clan and Family, and often for some political gain. The higher ranks of the Imperial Guard, though, most especially the positions of the Captain of the Guard and the heads of the watches were invariably promoted from the Seppun.

It was in the second half of the 4th century that the Imperial Guard, under Emperor Hantei V (Hantei

Fujiwa), first mobilized its legions to war. The Imperial Guard accompanied the Emperor to Crab Lands, where the Emperor put it (and himself) under Crab command, to aid in the war against the Shadowlands. The courage and dedication shown by the Seppun of the Guard won them great respect from the Crab.

The history of the Imperial Guard was strewn with successes, but with failure as well. First the Guard failed to protect Hantei V's son when he was abducted by agents of the Great Clans, an act that heralded the rule of the Gozoku. But the most famous failure of the Imperial Guard came in the year of 442, when gaijin headed by Garen Hawthorne slew the Empress Hantei VII (Hantei Yugozohime), during what would become known as The Battle of White Stag.

The relative peace that followed The Battle of White Stag coupled with their failure to defend Hantei Yugozohime led some of the following Emperors to regard the Imperial Guard only as a colorful honor guard and a status symbol. When Otomo Jama set out to the Burning Sands he asked his brother, the Emperor, an entire legion of Imperial guardsmen to accompany him. Of that legion only four survived to become Jama's henchmen, as he became Iuchiban.

This loss of a legion for that most heinous of Mahotsukai is still considered by many Seppun to be one of the greatest disasters to ever befall the family. The Iuchiban's attempt to rouse many Seppun ancestors from their graves to do battle for him, coupled with the previous disaster, insured that no unit from any clan excelled more in the Battle of the Stolen Graves against the blood sorcerer than the Imperial Guard.

The Imperial Guard's involvement in the end of Hantei XVI's reign of terror is another time of crisis in the history of the Guard. For the Imperial Guard to turn so against the Son of Heaven, even one as corrupt, delusional, and malicious as the Steel Chrysanthemum posed a crisis of faith for the devoted and pious Seppun, and many, unable to live with their shame, took their own life in the years that followed.

To their great dismay, the Imperial Guard was prevented by the Emperor to participate in the Battle of the Sleeping River against their old nemesis Iuchiban. Some Seppun asked (and were generally granted) leave to join the battle as individual, but as the Emperor did not join the battle, the Guard was prevented from participating as a unit.

The greatest disasters in the history of the Imperial Guard, however, occurred in the tumultuous 12th century.

The Scorpion Clan Coup caught the Seppun of the Imperial Guard by surprise. The deception of Bayushi Shouju, the death of the Hantei and the total elimination

of the Hidden Guard struck the Imperial Guard hard. Their honor, in their own eyes, was saved only by their Captain's involvement in saving the life of the young Emperor to be. Seppun Ishigawa, along with Isawa Kaede, smuggled the young Hantei Sotorii from Otosan Uchi and into the hands of the Phoenix Clan, thus securing the continuation of the Hantei Line.

Ishikawa continued to serve under Hantei XXXIX until they both died during the Second Day of Thunder. Ishikawa fought to protect an ailing Emperor for years and witnessed his slowly growing corruption, but his mysterious death during the Second Day of Thunder leaves it a mystery as to whether he would have protected the Emperor he had rescued as a child, or turn against him as his ancestors did against Hantei XIV.

The rise of Toturi to the throne brought startling changes to the Imperial Guard. For the first time in the history of the Guard they had a Captain not of the Seppun family. Toku was an admired general, well respected by almost all who knew him, but many Seppun saw it as a slap across the face to be led by the peasant-born Minor Clan daimyo. Many of the Guard learned to appreciate Toku as they got to know him, but others remained resentful even as they ground their teeth and obeyed his orders.

When Toturi died the Guard was engulfed by confusion. Traditionally, in the time of the Hantei line, any who bore the Hantei name received their protection. But now, none of the children of Toturi seemed to have any intention of abdicating his name, moreover – they seemed to be quite liberal in sharing it, granting the right to bear it upon favored retainers. The Guard deliberated for quite some time for which among the Four Winds (if any) it should lend its protection, and thus proclaim their support. When Toturi Tsudao declared herself Empress, and her claim was recognized by the Imperial Families (not to mention by the Captain of the Guard – the Monkey Champion, Toku, and his children), the Guard stepped out to protect and support her.

After the deaths of Toturi II (Toturi Tsudao) and then of Toku, the new Emperor Toturi III (Toturi Naseru) appointed his personal bodyguard, Yotsu Irie, as Captain of the Imperial Guard. Her appointment on top of Toku's was too much to endure for the most traditionalist of the Seppun, and sent many of them to Seppun Toshiaki, the Gozoku-aligned Master of the Hidden Guard. Unlike in the Hidden Guard, however, Irie managed to snip the resentment of those people in the bud. Those she could not win over, she simply discharged in disgrace. She was not about to let anyone who might harm her Emperor anywhere near him.

Irie died along with the Emperor in the Battle of the Tomb, deep in the Shadowlands. The Empress did not get to appoint a new Captain of the Guard, as she died a few months later when the Khan of the Unicorn attacked the Imperial city. Without a charge to protect and no leader, the Imperial Guard is facing one of its most frustrating time.

Organization of the Imperial Guard

The Imperial Guard was founded in the second century, and therefore it sought to emulate the established structure of military units as established a hundred years earlier by Akodo-kami, but on a smaller scale. Over the years there have been some changes made to that structure, but not many, as the Seppun are famously conservative.

The basic unit of the Imperial Guard is called a detail – consisting of only six guardsmen and their commanding gunso. In addition to regular details, there are also administrative details the ranks of which include medics, liaisons to the Hidden Guard, and people in charge of armor and weapon repairs.

Six regular details and an administrative detail comprise a watch, which is commanded by a chui, assisted by the gunso of the details. At the Emperor's court there is usually a watch overlooking the proceedings, with another held in reserve nearby. When the Emperor attends court the Captain of the Guard is almost invariably present as well, to overlook and command his underlings.

Four watches constitute an Imperial Guard Legion (for a total of 200 men). However, the Imperial Guard Legions are rarely used as such, except when the Emperor leads the armies of Rokugan in times of war. Each of the Legions is commanded by the most senior chui of its component watches, and in times when the Legions are active as such they are referred to as taisa.

In order to make sure the best protection is given to their charge, the Imperial Guard often trains and maneuvers with other bodies protecting the Imperial House, such as the Hidden Guard and the Empress' Guard.

In contemporary Rokugan there are three Imperial Guard Legions. In the past some Emperors saw it fit to have more, or less than that number. The entire Guard is commanded by the Captain of the Imperial Guard (who, in times of war, is referred to as General of the Imperial Guard), and he is aided by a staff of five chui.

Duties of the Imperial Guard

The Imperial Guard is the main defending and militant force of the Imperial Families, and as such is tasked with a number of duties. The first and foremost duty of the Imperial Guard, as well as its most ancient one, is of course the protection and defense of the Emperor and his immediate family. In the past, deciding who was entitled to the Imperial Guard's protection was pretty simple – anyone bearing the Hantei name received such protection. But under the Toturi dynasty, which used its name more freely, name alone could not be used to determine who deserved such protection, and thus this privilege was now given only to those specifically designed by the Emperor.

When traveling outside the Forbidden City, the Emperor and his immediate family are accompanied by at least four regular details, one of which serve as a scout unit, and an administrative detail. The other regular details spread around their charge in concentric circles as first, second and third lines of defense. The inner detail is normally the most experienced, and its commander is given temporary command over the other details.

In addition to the protection of the Imperial line itself, it became customary early on that the Emperor grants the privilege of an Imperial Guard escort to the daimyo of the Imperial families, most especially the Otomo family daimyo, who rarely made a public appearance without some Imperial Guard details around.

The Imperial Guard is also tasked with the protection and security of courts held by each of the Imperial Families, and for events sponsored by them, such as the "Jewel Tournaments" (with the exception of the Topaz Championship, which is under the patronage of the Crane Clan).

The Imperial Guard is also responsible for the protection, security and even entrance to the Forbidden City (the quarter of the Imperial City where to the Imperial Palace and the major administrative offices of the Empire are located). Only the Captain of the Imperial Guard may issue traveling papers giving access to these sections of Toshi Ranbo and Otosan Uchi (the Forbidden City of the former Imperial Capital is still nominally under the control of the Imperial Guard, but this authority is rarely enforced these days). Every visitor seeking entrance to the Forbidden City (even those bearing official invitations to the Imperial Court) must first approach the offices of the Imperial Guard and request that they allow them entrance through the gates. Any crime perpetrated within the Forbidden City is also ultimately under the responsibility of the Imperial Guard, but they have been known to share this responsibility with the Emerald and Jade Magistrates, as well as with the Hidden Guard.

Finally, the Emperor can assign any number of Imperial Guard details (although customarily never more than a legion) to any personage he wishes. In the past some Emperors did so as a show of respect, trust or affection, but also sometimes as a way to keep an eye on those they considered dangerous or untrustworthy, in a way that was not only polite, but also beyond refusal.

It is worth noting that the Captain of the Imperial Guard, despite being ultimately the personal yojimbo of the Emperor, is not his personal champion, and normally would not have the privilege of representing him in a duel. This right belongs to the Emerald Champion, and is a remnant of the days when that office included the personal protection of the Emperor. Only in instances when the Emerald Champion is unable of performing this rare duty, (because no Emerald Champion is yet chosen, or he is ill or wounded) will the Captain of the Imperial Guard be allowed to step up to the challenge.

The duties of the Captain of the Imperial Guard vary according to what he decides to oversee himself, and what he decides to delegate to his chui. The most recent Captain, Yotsu Irie, rarely left the side of the Emperor, and was in fact his personal yojimbo, delegating as much

of her administrative duties to her chui as she possibly could. She did not trust them blindly, however, and her unexpected (and seemingly random) inspections and audits were much feared by all within the Guard.

Trappings of the Office

The Imperial Guardsmen receive special uniforms and armor bearing the Mon of the Seppun Family prominently upon the chest. It is largely considered a great honor to serve within the ranks of the Imperial Guard. All members of the Imperial Guard receive their yearly stipend from the Guard, including those samurai who belong to one of the Clans, to prevent split loyalties (although no one within the Guard would ever phrase it so).

The Captain of the Guard wears a special suit of armor which bears several protecting spells, renewed routinely by the Hidden Guard. The Captain receives funds from the Seppun daimyo, which he uses to maintain the Guard. The Captain of the Guard receives a large estate within the Forbidden City, as well as the nearest chamber to the Emperor's, no matter where the Emperor stays.

Membership of the Imperial Guard

Every Seppun bushi in training is considered a candidate for the Imperial Guard, and it is considered somewhat of a disgrace for them not to be admitted into its ranks (unless, of course, an equally prestigious appointment presents itself). That said, not every graduate from the Seppun dojos will serve in the Emperor's presence. The duties of the Imperial Guard are many and various, but not equal in prestige, and those who do not prove themselves worthy enough will serve as little more than sentries on the perimeter walls of the Forbidden City, or clerks at the Guard offices at its gates. The sensei of the Seppun dojos always try to evaluate the talents of their students and inform the Captain of the Imperial Guard of their abilities, talents and inclinations. Those who show talents for investigation, for example, are usually sent to study with the Kitsuki, after which they will be assigned to the watch which polices the Forbidden City.

Talented bushi from the other Imperial Families are also admitted at times to the Guard, as a show of unity and harmony within the Imperials.

Great Clans bushi sometimes (though rarely) are invited to join the Guard as a recognition by the Emperor of their exceptional skills, devotion and loyalty, but also as a political tool – to gain some political favor with their Clan. Those recruited this way are almost invariably of the higher tiers of the samurai class within their clan, often immediate relatives of their Clan or family daimyo. The most famous such example is Doji Domotai, who served in the Imperial Guard prior to becoming the Champion of the Crane, upon her father's death.

Callimachus

SAMPLE NPC: SEPPUN GUARDSMAN

School/Rank: Seppun Guardsman rank 3**Insight:** 196

Air: 3	Earth: 4	Fire: 2	Water: 3	Void: 4
		Agility: 4	Perception: 4	

Honor: 4.2 **Status:** 3.0 **Glory:** 3.0

Skills: Battle 1, Calligraphy 1, Courtier 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation (Notice) 2, Jiujustu 1, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Law 2, Meditation (Void Recovery, Zanji) 3, Theology (Shintao) 1.

Kata: In Hantei's Honor, Chrysanthemum Petals in Rain.

SAMPLE NPC: SEPPUN SHUGENJA

School/Rank: Seppun Shugenja rank 3**Insight:** 195

Air: 4	Earth: 3	Fire: 2	Water: 4	Void: 3
			Intelligence: 3	

Honor: 3.7 **Status:** 3.0 **Glory:** 1.5

Skills: Calligraphy (Imperial Cipher) 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Investigation (Notice) 3, Kenjutsu (Wakizashi) 1, Lore: Law 2, Medicine 2, Meditation (Zanji) 3, Spellcraft 5, Stealth (Spell-casting) 4, Theology (Shintao) 4.

Advantage: Bland.

Spells: Commune *, Counterspell *, Sense *, Summon *, Bane of the Scorpion *, By the Light of Lady Moon *, Call Upon the Wind, Hand of Jurojin, Heart of Mortality, Lady Moon's Legion, Mists of Illusion, Path to Inner Peace *, Regrow the Wound, Reversal of Fortune, Secrets on the Wind *, Silent Waters, Summon Fog, Sympathetic Energies, Tempest of Air, The Eye Shall Not See *, The Ties That Bind, Wave-Borne Speed, Whispering Winds *, Wind-Borne Slumber, Wisdom of the Kami, Yari of Air. (* indicates an Innate Ability)

The Seppun Hidden Guard

When the Kami fell to Ningen-do, the first to greet them and swear fealty to Hantei-Kami were the Lady Seppun and her followers. Later, shortly after Hantei was proclaimed Emperor of Rokugan, the Seppun Imperial Guard was established to protect the Emperor's person. At the same time, a second secret group was created: one responsible for the spirit of the Emperor, the Hidden Guard. This organization was kept secret for a thousand years, through the entire reign of the Hantei line, its existence finally revealed only during the tumultuous events of the 12th century, a century in which not only the Imperial dynasty has changed for the first time in Rokugan's history, but also that presented more dangers to the spirit of the Emperor than all the previous centuries combined.

The history of the Hidden Guard can be divided into two distinct periods – before the Scorpion Clan Coup, and after it. High on Bayushi Shojū's list of priorities was the total elimination of the Hidden Guard. This mission was entrusted to Soshi Bantaro and his students, who efficiently and methodically assassinated all the active Shugenja of the Seppun family as one of the opening steps of the Coup. Were only spared those who were not considered a threat: the retired elders, those fresh from their gempukku, and those disgraced or incompetent enough.

Ironically, after the failed Coup, it was Shojū's widow who was to restore the Hidden Guard. Kachiko, now Empress of Rokugan, called all of these surviving Seppun shugenja back into active duty. However, the tasks laid

before them were enormous: the entire teaching system of the family's shugenja was in ruins and the Seppun shugenja, who were never numerous to begin with, just could not possibly fulfill all their traditional duties with their depleted ranks. And so, for the first time in the history of the Hidden Guard, shugenja from outside the Imperial Families were admitted into its ranks. Most of the Guard's new members were Phoenix shugenja, with whom the Seppun has preserved close ties since Shiba-kami transcribed the Tao of Shinsei, but a significant number of Lion shugenja also joined the Guard, along with a few from the other Clans.

With this recruitment from outside the Imperial Families, it was now impossible to keep the Hidden Guard the secret that it had been for a millennium. And so, while the Seppun abandoned the Hidden Guard's secrecy, the identities of those who served in it (with the exception of the Master of the Hidden Guard) were kept a closely guarded secret. The Clans and families daimyo alone were informed of identities of those in service of the Guard, but even them knew only of those who were their direct vassal. The only persons with full knowledge of those who serve in the Guard were the Master of the Hidden Guard, the Seppun daimyo (and often the Otomo daimyo as well), and the Emperor himself. However, replenishing the ranks of the Hidden Guard with non-Imperials created new problems. Traditionally the Hidden Guard trained its shugenja to work as one cohesive force, but then, with shugenja gathered from every corners of the Empire, coming from different dojos and schools, while

tension was rising between the Great Clans, and with the Seppun shugenja themselves displeased to be forced to share their ancient duties, teamwork was made delicate at best.

Kachiko used this division within the Hidden Guard to her advantage, as it made it easier for her to poison the Emperor, and by Fu-Leng, as the Hidden Guard was just about the only organization which could notice his influence on the weakening Hantei. With the Hidden Guard thus undermined, one of the greatest obstacles to Fu-Leng's plot was virtually removed.

After the Second Day of Thunder, the Seppun family took Hantei XXXIX's succumbing to the Dark Kami and the end of the Hantei line as a major failure on their part, but none took it more personally than the Seppun shugenja of the Hidden Guard: not only was the Emperor attacked on their watch, but this attack was of a spiritual nature, precisely the type of attack the Guard was created to prevent.

When Toruri I took the throne, one of the tasks ahead of him was to recreate the recently restored, fractured, and demoralized Hidden Guard. But with so much work laid before him as the Empire emerged from civil war, the urgent kept taking precedence over the important, and the strengthening of the Hidden Guard was neglected. Thus, the Hidden Guard was at one of its lowest point ever when the Lying Darkness attacked and abducted the Emperor. It was only after he was rescued and then married Isawa Kaede that any real thought was given to the Guard's necessary overhaul to restore it to its former power. Kaede was a powerful shugenja herself, and her status as Oracle of Void gave her extensive knowledge on the spiritual and its dangers. And so she set herself to work, strengthening the numbers of Seppun shugenja within the guard while gradually reducing the number of the others (though she did not eliminate them entirely). She restored common training and maneuvers, to improve teamwork and morale among the Hidden Guard and restore its former glory. She instituted combined maneuvers with complementary forces, such as the Imperial Guard and the Empress' Guard. However, while strengthening the Guard, she failed to notice (or perhaps she did notice, but chose not to act upon it) the discontent that was spreading among many of the higher ranks of the Seppun over her pronounced involvement in the Seppun's affairs, and inadvertently placed one of these malcontents – a shugenja named Seppun Toshiaki – at the head of the Hidden Guard.

Years later, Toshiaki aligned himself with the Gozoku conspiracy meant to weaken the power of the Toturi line, but was careless enough that Toturi III realized his affiliation. This, naturally, did not serve to increase the power of the Seppun Hidden Guard. Toturi III came to prefer the protection of his brother, Sezaru, or his Jade Champion, Asahina Sekawa (both of them were aware of Toshiaki's fealty) whenever serious threats of spiritual nature arose. Eventually the Emperor ordered Toshiaki's assassination. Toturi III died shortly after in the Shadowlands during the Battle at Shinsei's Tomb, and he had left no instruction regarding Toshiaki's succession.

Toturi Kurako, the Emperor's widow, involved herself very little in the affairs of the Hidden Guard, occupied as she was with the emerging civil war, and did not appoint a new Master to replace Toshiaki. When she performed seppuku during the Khan's attack, the Hidden Guard was left once again without leadership, and without a charge to protect. It remains to be seen if this ancient organization can survive the turbulent times to come.

Organization of the Hidden Guard

The basic unit of the Seppun Hidden Guard is known as the futari. Each futari consists of two shugenja: one senior and a junior. Whenever they are not training at the Seppun dojo, it is the responsibility of the senior shugenja to continue the training and education of his junior and share his experience with him. Usually, when the Emperor or someone of his immediate family travels, there is a futari accompanying him, and another one that scouts ahead (this includes the destination, if it isn't the Imperial Palace). A futari is always at the Emperor's side while he is in the Imperial Palace as well, though it usually accompanies from a distance, so as not to expose their actions. When the Emperor is attending Court, there are usually anywhere from three to nine futari mingling in the crowd, constantly vigilant against any suspicious activity. In public appearances by the Emperor in fronts of large crowds (such as in public funerals, or public addresses), even greater numbers of futari will be present.

In addition to those futari that are in active duty, there is always at least three times that number waiting in reserve to be called to duty at any given moment. All these shugenja are commanded by the Masters of the Futari. There are generally three Masters of the Futari: the Master of the Dawn Futari, Master of the Day Futari, and Master of the Night Futari. Of these three, the latter is usually the most esteemed and most experienced shugenja, as the night is considered the most challenging, not to say dangerous, of shifts.

The three Masters of the Futari are commanded directly by the Master of the Hidden Guard, and his Lieutenant. In addition to these the Guard is also served by several specialized futari, each answerable directly to the Master of the Guard and his Lieutenant. These futari engage in divination, espionage, and purification through magic.

Duties of the Hidden Guard

The Hidden Guards are the personal shugenja of the Emperor, and thus are, with few exceptions, the only shugenja allowed to practice magic in his presence. They will actively prevent any unauthorized shugenja from doing so in the Emperor's presence. In normal situations the only exceptions to this law are the Elemental Masters, the Jade Champion, and the daimyo of the major shugenja families, however, some Emperors have given allowances to others as well.

They are also responsible to the spiritual well being of the Emperor and the Imperial Line, and to protecting

them from all dangers of a spiritual nature. The Hidden Guard is responsible to prepare and maintain the wards protecting the Imperial Palace and the Imperial Line from danger. Whenever the Emperor, or one of his immediate family, leaves the Imperial Palace he is generally accompanied by at least two futari of the Hidden Guard – one that stays by the Emperor's side at all times, and one that scouts ahead. Whenever the Emperor or one of his immediate family is to be hosted in any place, it is the duty of the Hidden Guard to dispatch a futari of their ranks ahead of the Imperial guest, to inspect the premises and ascertain that it is free from the presence of evil spirits or similar threats. Finally, it is the duty of the Hidden Guard to see that, upon his death, the soul of the Emperor reaches the Spirit Realms safely. For that purpose it is not uncommon for some of the Guard to perform sepukku upon the death of the Emperor, so as to accompany and protect him in his way.

When faced with threats from evil spirits, renegade shugenja, or the threats of the Taint, it is the duty of any member of the Hidden guard to lay down his life, and even his very soul, before allowing any harm to come to the emperor. This is arguably a greater willingness to sacrifice than any other body protecting the Emperor, as none of them is required to sacrifice their very soul and place in the Celestial Order.

Trappings of the Office

Due to the secretive nature of the Hidden Guard, there is little in the way of honors or glory in serving in its ranks. The only honors associated with it are the sacred duty and service in the very presence of the Emperor and his immediate family, which, for a samurai, are honors not to be dismissed.

Since the Scorpion Clan Coup the identity of the Master of the Hidden Guard is no longer kept in secret, and he receives funds from the Seppun daimyo to maintain and train the Guard. He is also granted a suite of rooms in the vicinity of the Emperor's private chambers, in the Imperial Palace and wherever the Emperor is staying. He also receives a small estate in the Imperial Capital, in the shadow of the Imperial Palace, but normally, he would have little time to stay there.

It is considered a violation of propriety for the Master of the Hidden Guard to be more than a mile away from the Emperor at any given time.

Membership of the Hidden Guard

Until the Scorpion Clan Coup the members of the Hidden Guard were invariably of the Seppun family. Candidate shugenja were picked shortly after their graduation from the Seppun academy, selected not only for their abilities with the kami, but also for their ability to be inconspicuous, as the Guard has been a closely kept secret. On those rare occasions when a Seppun shugenja had been discovered to have an exceptional affinity for fire or earth, they were almost invariably selected as

candidates for the Hidden Guard, but were not trained by the school of the family but usually in the schools of the Isawa. The candidates went through specialized training, during which the strengths and weaknesses of each of them was assessed, and the division into futari was made. As part of their training candidates for the Guard were familiarized with the structures and tasks of other bodies with which the Hidden Guard works – such as the Imperial Guard, and the Empress' Guard. Two out of three candidates for the Guard did not complete this period of training.

Once this training was completed, the candidates were accepted into the Guard as the junior members of futari. Senior members were usually created in two ways: most seniors were junior members who have proven their worth and were granted promotion, but at times seniors were recruited from outside – veteran, accomplished Seppun shugenja who have proven their worth, were sometimes offered this position in the guard. The Masters of the Futari are invariably promoted from experienced seniors, with the Master of the Night Futari always having served as Master of Day or Dawn Futari before his appointment.

The Lieutenant of the Hidden Guard has always served for a time as a Master of Futari, usually as Master of the Night Futari. Unlike the Lieutenant, the actual Master of the Hidden Guard was not always promoted from within the ranks of the Guard. It was not uncommon for an Emperor to appoint to this position someone he knew and with whom he had developed trust. That said, it was exceedingly rare for an Emperor to impeach a sitting Master of the Guard from his office, and was invariably followed by sepukku.

Much of this tradition has been lost following the Scorpion Clan Coup. Of the retirees who survived the Coup there was one shugenja, Seppun Norihito, who served as Master of the Dawn Futari, and it was up to him, under the direction of the Empress Kachiko, to rebuild the hidden guard. However, now that the guard was accepting shugenja from the Clans, it was difficult to monitor the quality and training of those accepted into the ranks. Training them to work as a cohesive force proved even harder, and was not universally successful.

Toturi Kaede restored the ancient organization of the Hidden Guard and diminished the presence of Clan-affiliated shugenja within the Guard (although Clan-affiliated shugenja, particularly Phoenix and Lion, still serve in the Guard in significant numbers), and now it operates roughly as it did prior to the Scorpion Coup.

Shugenja from outside the Imperial Families are recruited in a slightly different manner. Representatives of the Hidden Guard are present in tournaments where shugenja may participate throughout the Empire – from the Jade Tournament to the Tournament of the Emperor's Favored. Whenever they encounter someone whose qualities seem to suit those desired by the Hidden Guard, the representative of the guard would make inquiries regarding the background of the potential candidate, and should those inquiries prove favorable, the representative would approach the Daimyo of the potential candidate, asking him permission to recruit the shugenja. Only if the Daimyo approves would the potential candidate himself

be approached for the first time. Should he accept the offer, he will be sent to the Dojo of the Hidden Guard for additional training.

It is interesting to note that, although the Seppun have never ostensibly expressed hostility to the Scorpion Clan after its restoration, no Scorpion shugenja, or anyone who trained at the Scorpion shugenja schools, has ever been accepted to the Guard.

Dojo of the Hidden Guard

Schools: Seppun Shugenja, Isawa Shugenja, most other Clans Shugenja schools, excluding the Scorpion schools.

Benefit: Any ward or damage-inflicting spells cast by a member of the dojo may be cast so they have no detrimental effect on the Emperor or his immediate family.

The Dojo of the Hidden Guard, also called the Seppun Academy, is not located in the territories of the Imperial Families, but rather in the lands of the Phoenix, in close proximity to Shiro Shiba. This location ensured that this dojo was one of the Imperial dojos least damaged in the fall of the former Imperial Capital, Otosan Uchi. The dojo is a small but lavish and beautifully decorated temple, which dates back to the first century of the Isawa Calendar.

All those who serve in the Hidden Guard, including Clan-affiliated shugenja, have received at least part of their training in this dojo, and it is customary for the

Emperor to invite the best shugenja of the Empire to teach his future protectors. As can be expected being invited to teach at this dojo, even for a short while, is one of the greatest of honors which can be bestowed on a shugenja. Most of the shugenja sensei ever invited to teach are of the Phoenix Clan, although a good number of them are Crane, Lion, and Dragon, while shugenja of the Minor Clans only rarely attain this honor. Since the Scorpion Clan Coup no Scorpion shugenja was invited to teach at the dojo though, and when asked about this the Seppun deny that this is deliberate. In the years following the Coup the diminished numbers of the Seppun shugenja lead to some Phoenix shugenja serving as master sensei of the dojo, among which were Isawa Tomo and Asako Kaushen, but this position is normally reserved to a Seppun master.

Sources:

Book: Winter Court: Kyuden Asako; The Four Winds.

Fiction: Hour of the Wolf; The Final Keeper, part one; the Underhand; Web of Lies; The Battle at the Tomb part one; Fires of Toshi Ranbo, part one.

Callimachus

The Hashira Horitsu

The Hashira Horitsu, or pillars of law, is a select group of magistrates, nobles and courtiers that meet with the Emperor after his return from Winter Court (during the month of the Dragon) to draft and update the laws of the Empire. They usually meet in Kyuden Otomo, and are lead by the Emerald Champion.

The Pillars of Law have tremendous political power : they are those who prepare and clarify the laws for the Emperor's approval, those who make the Emperor's will into decrees to be sent to the different clans, and they are the only ones that can debate about new and old laws to be abandoned, modified or created. The Hashira Horitsu were founded because some laws were found to be badly written or obsolete, and were tasked to make the Imperial laws more adapted to the samurai's day-to-day life. They assist the Emperor to create new laws, and often submit laws of their own to the Emperor's approval. The meeting is lead by the Emperor himself if he wishes to attend, the Emerald Champion if the Emperor is not present, or the highest status magistrate if neither can attend.

The meeting usually lasts 3 days, and often more. The Imperial Court can watch and enjoy the Hashira Horitsu's debates from the balcony of their meeting room. It is common for the courtiers to debate about the discussed

laws too, wondering which ones will be submitted to the Emperor and which of those will be accepted. However, those debates remain nothing more than political games, as all courtiers know they have no influence on the Pillars of Law's discussions, but they're a good way to hone one's skills at sadane, debating and outwitting the others courtiers. Sometimes, some courtiers even send courier pigeons to keep their clansmates apprised of the latest developments, using to their advantage the delay that exists between the moment the Emperor approves or creates a new law and the time it takes for it to reach the various provinces.

Very few scandals have shaken the Pillars of Law. The most serious incident occurred when Otomo Daikenin, an imperial regent, attempted to use the absence of both the Emperor and the Emerald Champion to create and vote a law that would have greatly increased the power of the Yasuki family. He was discovered and executed for trying to bypass the Emperor and influence the laws. Since then, the laws are checked multiples times to prevent anyone from advancing personal agendas.

The Hashira Horitsu were introduced in Otosan Uchi.

Okuma

◆ The Dojo ◆

Schools and Paths

NEW ADVANCED SCHOOL

The Emperor's Personal Guard [Bushi]

The Emperor's Personal Guard is an elite unit of samurai in personal service to the Emperor. It is charged with the protection of the Emperor, Empress, The emperor's children, the Imperial Chancellor and certain members of the Imperial court which the Emperor deems necessary. Its headquarters used to be in Otosan Uchi, near the Imperial Palace in the Chisei District of the inner city.

They are composed of 200 extremely skilled and honorable bushi. This special guard uses some of the finest weapons and armor to have been crafted. They wear either a ceremonial grey or black uniform with silver or gold insignia depending on the situation. Their symbol is an eleven pointed star of gold worn on their kimonos or helmets and armor.

Requirements

Ring/Traits: Perception 4, Fire 4, Reflexes 4

Skills: Kenjutsu 6, Defense 5, JiuJitsu 3, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation 5

Advantages: Quick, Irreproachable

Other: 3.0+ Honor, Must be at least School Rank 3 in your original School before entering this School, Must be invited by the Protector of the Imperial City, or the Captain of the Imperial Guard. The advantage requirements may be waived by increasing all skill rank requirements by one.

RANK 1: STUDENT OF THE SHINING PRINCE

The Son of Heaven was a wise ruler and a great swordsman. He did help pass the techniques that he developed on to his son, and to those that would protect his line. As those that would protect the Emperor with their lives you know that a threat can come from anywhere at any time. Due to your eternal vigilance, you are impossible to surprise: you don't suffer an initiative penalty for being surprised. You also gain a bonus to your attack, and initiative equal to your Insight Rank.

**RANK 2: GUARDIANS
OF THE HEAVENLY SOVEREIGN**

The Emperor's Guardians are known to be almost untouchable when engaged in personal combat. The guard knows that to get hit is to become less effective in combat and thus giving your opponent an advantage. So over the years the Guards have learned the subtle openings and moves that all styles share, and they have learned to use them against their foes to great effect. When someone you

are currently engaged in melee with attacks you, you can spend a Void Point to make a Perception/Investigation roll with a TN equal to the attack roll of your opponent. If you succeed, you dodge the attack. You may only use this once per opponent per turn. You also roll extra dice on damage equal to your Honor rank.

**RANK 3: THE EMPEROR'S WORD
KNOWS NO BOUNDS**

The Emperor's word is law, and above reproach all those that go against his word shall meet with swift and decisive punishment. As one that guards him personally, it is your duty to seek and take out with deadly efficiency all those that would seek to usurp the Emperor. Add twice your Insight Rank to all attack and initiative rolls replacing the bonus you gained at Rank 1. You also gain an additional action per round that may be used however you see fit, including attacking or performing any miscellaneous actions (simple or complex).

NEW ADVANCED SCHOOL

**Seven Black Stones
Tactical School [Bushi]**

The Seven Black Stones Tactical School is the ultimate expression of Akodo's teachings; it combines prowess on the field of battle with both the blade and troops. The name of the school comes from the game of Go. A skilled player will often give a less skilled opponent a bonus of several stones placed before the game begins. Seven stones is often thought to be a monumental advantage. Many criticize the arrogance of naming the school after this practice, claiming that the Lion assume that much superiority. Students of the school quickly realize that this is the kind of advantage one seizes early in the fight, never one you give an opponent.

Requirements

Rings/Traits: Perception 5, Intelligence 4

Skills: Battle (Mass Combat) 6, War Fans 3, Kenjutsu 3, Storytelling (Oratory) 3, History 3, Defense 3, Bushido Lore 3

Advantages: Tactician

Other: Students may waive the Tactician requirement by increasing all skill requirements by one.

RANK ONE: SOUL OF AKODO

At this rank the Tactician learns that a good commander is one who stays alive long enough to issue his commands. You may now add twice your Honor rank to your TN to be Hit. This stacks with other bonuses. If your TN to

be Hit gains no bonus from other School Techniques, add three times your Honor rank to your TN to be hit instead.

RANK TWO: TACTICS OF MISTAKE

The Akodo Tactician now learns to identify any mistake his opponent makes and exploit it to the best of his abilities, no matter how slight the mistake may be. The Tactician may now spend a Void point to force his opponent to discard the highest rolled die on any Bugei, Battle, or Initiative roll. The Tactician must be aware of the action she intends to affect and must be a participant in the encounter (i.e., she can not watch a duel and force a duelist to discard a die, but may use this Technique if she was being attacked and aware of the attack).

RANK THREE: ART OF WAR

At this point the Akodo Tactician has mastered the Art of War and takes warfare to an entire new level of perfection. She may now gain a number of Free Raises equal to her Honor rank on all Battle, Bushido Lore, War Fan, Kenjutsu, Storytelling (oratory), History and Defense rolls.

NEW PATH

Imperial Matchmaker [Courtier]

The Imperial Families always saw it as their province to supervise over the ties between the various Clans and families of the Empire. In Rokugan's traditional society, marriage can greatly strengthen or weaken one's position—a beneficial wedding would give your smithies access to the in-laws' iron mines, while a disastrous one would ruin your hopes to be awarded an imperial position. And so the Otomo, with the discreet backing of the Emperors, made sure that people who could pose a threat to the authority of the Empire would enter into marriages that would prevent them from realizing their potential. The Miya, on the other hand, used their efforts in matchmaking in trying to prevent wars, strife, and suffering throughout the Empire.

Technique Rank: 4

Path of Entry: Miya Herald 3, Otomo Courtier 3

Path of Egress: Re-enter the same school at the next Rank.

Requirements: Courtier (gossip, manipulation) 5, Lore (Heraldry) 4, Social Position (matchmaker)

Special: You may use Path of Entry: Bayushi Courtier 4, or Doji Courtier 4 provided you also have at least 4 point worth of the Allies (Imperials) Advantage. You would then re-enter the same school at the next rank.

TECHNIQUE: TYING THE SILKEN KNOT

You impose the Emperor's will by creating (and breaking) ties between Rokugan's movers and shakers to advance his agenda. You have studied the lineages of the Empire's major families. Those you meet get out of their ways to please you in hope of gaining your favor, thus landing an advantageous alliance for them and theirs. You may add your Status Ranks plus your Glory Ranks to all Courtier, Etiquette, and Lore (Heraldry) rolls.

When you are a guest at any samurai home, temple, palace or keep, once per session per Insight Rank you may make an opposed Status/Courtier roll to demand that your host grant you or another person you specify the use of any ally, servant under his or a subordinate's authority, or any artisan or merchant under his patronage, for a period of one week (if you have the Otomo Courtier School Rank 2 Technique, the time periods stack). Alternatively, you may require that your host grant you or another person you specify an invitation to one of his clan's courts the following winter, or access to one of her clan's dojos for one season (as in the Advantage "Guest of the Dojo"). The Matchmaker can only make demands that would benefit the Emperor, the Empire or the Imperial Families in some clear manner. If your host refuses this demand, or is unable to grant it, he loses one Honor rank.

NEW PATH

Miya Bowman [Bushi]

While the Miya are a family of peacemakers, many serve in the Imperial Legions. Following the example of their Daimyo Miya Shoin, a handful of promising Heralds train with the Tsuruchi archers.

Technique Rank: 3

Path of Entry: Miya Herald 2

Path of Egress: Miya Herald 3

TECHNIQUE: SHOIN'S HEROES

It is said that a Herald's words travel faster than any arrow, but the Bowmen know better. When their voice is not enough, the Miya rely of the speed and accuracy of their arrows to protect the loyal servants of the Emperor. Miya Bowmen may add twice their Kyujutsu skill ranks to their Initiative. When using a Yumi, you are able to use the Guard maneuver. Additionally, you receive one Free Raise that may only be used to Guard an ally. Finally, all bonuses to your TN to be Hit granted by the Miya Herald school are doubled against ranged attacks. If you don't have a Yumi and arrows, you are given them.

*Wargames, Akodo Akira,
Callimachus & Hida Tango*

Expanded Skills

Many skills from the first and second editions never made it as skills and/or emphases into the new Third Edition. Similarly, many precisions and alternate or optional rules were never covered. This article proposes third edition rules for these options, as well as introduces a few new ones. These rules do not supersede any other from the Third Edition line, they supplement them.

HIGH SKILLS *Acting*

When using the Acting skill to impersonate anyone, this persona's base Status and Glory are 2 and 0, respectively. You can make Raises to increase either the persona's Glory or Status by two additional ranks per Raise. When using the Acting skill to appear as a specific individual (as per the Mastery Ability Rank 7), you must make Raises to emulate that person's Status and Glory ranks. If this is not done, anyone who knows the person in question will gain a third Free Raise to pierce your disguise.

Calligraphy

Emphases: Kana, Kanji, Specific Organization Cipher.

Kana: This Emphasis is used when writing in kana (script).

Kanji: This Emphasis is used when writing in kanji (characters).

Specific Organization Cipher: This Emphasis represents a specific cipher used by a specific set of people. This can be a family (Asako) cipher, an organization (Kolat) cipher, a School (Daidoji Harriers) cipher, or some other type of cipher.

Honor Loss: Displaying knowledge of a cipher or teaching it without permission is a dishonorable act and could have dire consequences (especially in the case of the Kolat).

Courtier

Mastery Abilities

Rank 5: The TN to recognize someone without Infamy is reduced by 5.

Rank 7: If someone is using Courtier (Manipulation) on you, you may roll Awareness/Courtier (Manipulation) against a TN equal to your opponent's Awareness x5 to perceive that you are being manipulated.

Rank 10: The TN to recognize someone without Infamy is reduced by 5.

Etiquette

Emphasis: Diplomacy.

Diplomacy: This Emphasis is used when mediating a dispute between parties and at least one of them does not wish for assistance. You must make an Awareness/Etiquette (Diplomacy) roll vs. TN equal to Willpower x5 of unwilling parties (bitter foes may require the would-be diplomat to make Raises). If the roll fails, you may make no further attempts until significant changes in the conflict arise.

Mastery Abilities

Rank 7: You may ignore one required Raise when using Diplomacy.

Rank 10: You may ignore one required Raise when using Diplomacy.

Investigation

Emphasis: Ichi Miru.

Ichi Miru: The so-called "cold read" Emphasis. This Emphasis represents the ability to glean information from someone through observation. Make a Perception/Investigation (Ichi Miru) vs. TN 20 to find out about any of the target's Advantage or Disadvantage that could translate into visible habits, mannerisms, temperament, or drive.

Lore

It is possible to use Lore: Heraldry to identify an individual. Roll Intelligence/Lore: Heraldry vs. TN [50 - (target's Glory x5)] to recognize another person. You gain a Free Raise on this roll if that person is from the same family or Clan as you or if wearing an identifying personal chop or mon.

Mastery Abilities

Rank 3: You gain a Free Raise on Lore Skills pertaining to your Clan and family.

Rank 5: You gain a Free Raise on Lore Skills pertaining to your Clan and family.

Rank 7: If you decide to make a pertaining Lore Skill check (usually TN 20) before making an Artisan or Performance skill check, you can gain a Free Raise on the related Artisan or Performance skill roll.

Storytelling

Emphases: Bragging [addendum], Death Poem, Haiku, Renga, Tanka; Unicorn Travel Poetry.

Bragging: When using this Emphasis to brag in court, you may make three Raises to increase your Glory gain by 1 point.

Death Poem: This is the Emphasis to perform Death Poems; the poem a samurai writes before committing seppuku.

Haiku: This is the Emphasis used to perform haiku poems.

Ranga: This is the Emphasis used to perform ranga poems (a ranga is a 48-syllable poem with an initial 5-7-5 pattern followed by a 7-7 stanza which links to another 5-7-5 stanza).

Tanka: This is the Emphasis used to perform tanka poems (a tanka is a 31-syllable poem written in a 5-7-5-7-7 pattern and that is written in kana rather than kanji).

Unicorn Travel Poetry: This is the Emphasis used to perform the infamous Unicorn Travel Poetry.

Mastery Abilities

Rank 5: When bragging before a battle, if you roll at least 50, your opponents must make a Fear test. Your Fear Rating is equal to your Glory Rank.

Rank 10: When bragging before a battle, if you roll at least 40, your opponents must make a Fear test. Your Fear Rating is equal to your Glory Rank +1 (this replaces the similar effect from the Rank 5 Mastery Ability).

BUGEI SKILLS

Battle

Emphasis: Leadership

Leadership: The character may effectively lead and govern the actions of up to 10 NPCs (though his actual military rank, from gunso and up, may place more than this number of soldiers under his command, this Emphasis applies when the commanding officer wants a tight control over a fraction of his troops and micro-manages his subordinates in immediate vicinity). If your troops feel mistreated or abused, you must successfully make a Willpower/Battle (Leadership) roll to have them follow your orders. The TN is 15 for highly unusual orders, 25 for blatantly suicidal orders, and 35 for orders which disobeys higher authority. In times of war there is a +10 penalty to TNs due to stress and the chaos of the battlefield.

Mastery Abilities

Rank 3: Can govern up to 20 NPCs.

Rank 5: Can govern up to 30 NPCs; the TN penalty in times of war is now +5 only.

Rank 7: Can govern up to 40 NPCs.

Rank 10: Can govern up to 50 NPCs; you now ignore TN penalties during times of war.

Iaijutsu

Emphases: Assessment, Fast Draw, Focus, Evaluation, Specific Weapon

Assessment: This Emphasis is used on the initial Iaijutsu roll made to learn pieces of information about your opponent in the duel.

Fast Draw: This Emphasis is used to draw a weapon without taking an action (TN 20).

Focus: This Emphasis is used on rolls to avoid striking after a focus during a duel.

Evaluation: If a character thinks he can take an opponent but the Gamemaster knows otherwise, the Gamemaster rolls a secret Iaijutsu/Perception (Evaluation) TN 15 for the character. If the roll is a success, the player will be informed by the Gamemaster that his character has now some doubt about his chances at victory.

Specific Weapon: This Emphasis is used when striking with a particular weapon (typically this would be the katana, but it is left open for the sake of completeness) during a duel.

LOW SKILLS

Deceit

Emphasis: Obiesaseru

Obiesaseru: This Emphasis is a specialized form of intimidation, used only by members of the Imperial families, the Imperial Guards, or the Imperial Legions (including Emerald and Jade Magistrates on duty under the Emerald or Jade Champion). By appealing to the target's belief that the Imperial Legions are the best-trained samurai in the Empire, and that the entire Celestial Order stands behind them, a member of the Imperial House or someone with adequate status can freeze a samurai in his tracks. The Imperial character must successfully make a Contested Willpower/Deceit (Obiesaseru) vs. the target's Willpower to freeze it for one round (the target can move and defend normally, but cannot approach or attack). Raises can increase the duration or add targets. Against non-Rokugani, this works the same as Intimidation. You must have a token of Imperial authority in order to use Obiesaseru.

Mastery Abilities

Rank 7: You gain a Free Raise for using Obiesaseru.

Rank 10: You may use Obiesaseru without a token of Imperial authority but doing so increase your TN by 5.

Honor Loss: Obiesaseru does not incur an Honor Loss if used for legitimate purpose by a member of the Imperial Guards or the Imperial Legions (including Emerald or Jade Magistrates, as stated above).

Kalajel

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

Some of these Advantages refer to Station points. Complete rules about Station can be found in *Way of the Daimyo*.

AFFLUENT [GRANTED] (3 POINTS)

Once per game, you can make use of your clan's wealth. You may get items the value of which may not exceed 30 times your insight rank in koku. These items can only be used as political gifts to non-player characters, or be returned after the mission. You gain 2 station (Ambassador) points that can only be spent for gifts.

BLISSFUL BETROTHAL [GRANTED] (3 POINTS)

A beneficial marriage has been negotiated for you. As long as you remain betrothed to or married with that person, the following advantages are considered to cost 2 Points less (to a minimum of 1 Point): Allies, Ear of the Emperor, Kharmic Tie (with betrothed/spouse only), Social Position, and Wealthy.

CONNECTED [GRANTED] (3 POINTS)

You gain 2 Free Raises for one social roll per day by using your friends' good name to support your position. You gain 2 station (Ambassador) points, which can only be spent on allies.

CORRESPONDENCE (0 POINT)

This Advantage can only be bought at the same time you buy an Ally. The cost of the Ally is reduced by 1 Point (to a minimum of 1 Point). This Ally is a person with whom you communicate only by letters, and thus is slow to give information or muster support for you.

DARLING OF THE COURT [GRANTED] (2 POINTS)

You have caught the attention of a high ranking person, perhaps the Emperor himself, and you are now the center of attention at the court. For the next six months your Glory rank is considered 2 ranks higher, and many sycophants follow your every moves. For 2 Experience Points each, you can turn them into 2-points Ally. At the end of the six months this advantage is lost, but the Allies remain.

EAR OF THE EMPEROR [GRANTED] (5 POINTS)

You have an important contact at the Imperial Court, giving you substantial political leverage. You gain additional +5 points of Glory and +5 points of Status.

FAVOR [GRANTED] (1-5 POINTS)

This Advantage costs 1 Point per rank of the favor. You can call upon a favor from an influential person. See the

Doji Courtier Favor Table (*L5R Third Edition*, p. 123) for examples of favors you can call upon and determine their cost. The favor is lost after use.

HARMONIC ALIGNMENT [INHERENT] (10 POINTS)

Imperial families and monks characters only. You can sense the presence of the Lying Darkness and creatures with over 2 ranks of Shadowlands Taint, thanks to the extraordinary balance of the elements in you. Whenever you are close to such foul things, the Gamemaster will make a secret Void roll with TN 15. Success indicates that you have detected them.

INHERITANCE: SUBTLETY OF THE COURT [GRANTED] (8 POINT)

You have inherited one of the seven original copies of the book Subtlety of the Court, by Otomo Madoko. You gain +1k0 to your Courtier and Etiquette skill rolls due to your intimate understanding of the wisdom contained in this precious tome, and one Free Raise on all Lore skill rolls involving display of obscure knowledge in court as a means to entertain other courtiers, as you have learned how to make the most of this knowledge.

MASTER OF THE COURT [GRANTED] (10 EXP)

You must have the Ambassador Station to take this Advantage. You gain +5 Station (Ambassador) points.

SACROSANCT [GRANTED] (10 POINTS)

You must have an Honor rank of 3 or higher to take this advantage. You are under the direct protection of the Emperor. As long as your Honor Rank remains at least 3 and you aren't accused of acting against the Emperor, you are granted this advantage by Imperial decree, which can be removed by another decree. Those who strike you in a fight before you have attacked them lose 5 points of Honor per Wound Rank they inflicted to you, and their Glory becomes infamy if they kill or knock you out.

Disadvantages

ADOPTED BLOOD (1-3 POINTS)

You, your parents, or your grandparents were adopted into the Clan. You now have to overcome the stigma of being a recent addition to the Clan. Your Status is reduced by 5 points for each point this Disadvantage costs.

A HOME IN ASHES (1 POINT)

You have no family, no inheritance, no land, and may not use the Kharma optional rule.

BLIND (8 POINTS; 6 POINTS FOR MONKS AND SHUGENJA)

Since birth or because of an unfortunate accident, you are blind. Your TN for all rolls that require sight suffer a +20 penalty (including melee attacks). Ranged attacks are impossible. Your TN to be Hit is reduced by 15. Actions like reading, visually identifying family mons, read lips, are also impossible for you. Many actions that would be performed casually by persons able to see are more difficult for you and require you to touch the objects (ex: to manipulate them) or persons (ex: to memorize their face). At the Gamemaster's discretion, you may need more time than normal to perform those actions, and your TN may suffer a +5 to +15 penalty. Finally, you suffer a -10 penalty to your Initiative at all times. However, you ignore TN penalties for conditions such as dim light or total darkness.

ELDERLY (4 POINTS)

You are past the retirement age. Some may think you are actually retired, or will try to push you towards retirement. You must make two Raises on all Strength and Agility rolls, as well as on all skill rolls based on these Traits.

FRAGILE (3 POINTS)

Your body is frail and has difficulties recovering from wounds. You double the time required to heal, and halve

the wounds recovered from non-magic treatment. Your stamina is considered one rank lower to determine the time required to heal.

MADNESS (1-5 POINTS)

It is common knowledge that you suffer from some mental illness, and that you are prone to unpredictable bouts of madness. Despite your condition you are still able to act in society, but people tend to avoid you. Few trust you and you usually end up assigned to dangerous missions. Once per session, preferably at a time of greater stress for you, the Gamemaster will require that you make a Willpower roll against a TN equal to $15 + 5$ times the cost of this Disadvantage. If you fail, you lose your mind and start acting erratically (the Gamemaster takes control of your character) for a number of rounds equal to the difference between your roll and the TN. This disadvantage is worth one less point for Scorpion of the Bitter Lies dojo.

OLD (2 POINTS)

You are between 30 and 40 years old. You must make a Raise on all Strength and Agility rolls, as well as on all skills based on these Traits.

Okuma

Items

WAR FAN OF SEPPUN MAKO (4 POINTS, UNIQUE) [WEAPON]

Seppun Mako is regarded as the most cunning general the Seppun have ever produced. After his death, he ascended to Tengoku, where he commands the spirit legions that guard the Celestial Palace. The item is a 2k1 war fan, when wielded in combat the war fan gives a bonus on your tides of battle, and your initiative of +5, it also gives all of your allies within a 15 foot radius a bonus to their attack and damage equal to your honor.

AKKUAI-UO (TRULY UNIQUE) [WEAPON]

Akkuai-Uo was forged for Hantei Genji by the legendary swordsmith Doji Yasurugi. Hantei Fujiwa was the first to wield it in battle, and his victory awakened the soul of the sword, granting it incredible powers against the Shadowlands. Akkuai-Uo is a 6K4 No-Dachi. For purposes of Damage, if the wielder belongs to the Otomo, Seppun or Hantei lines he is considered to have Strength 11. Further it deals double damage against non-Rokugani or to anyone outside the Celestial Order.

OBI OF OTOMO GOSAIKO (5 POINTS, GRANTED)

Otomo Gosaiko was spotted early by the sensei of the Otomo Courtiers as a child with great potential. During play with other children she showed a great aptitude for

manipulation. For her gempukku Gosaiko was given the incredible task of seeing to it that an ambitious young courtier of the Scorpion Clan became dishonored. In less than two days she had set about the events that led to the courtier's expulsion from the clan. She would later rise to the posting of Sensei of the Otomo Courtiers and help pass on the knowledge she gained over the years. The obi is made of some of the finest silks in Rokugan, and uses some of the most exotic dyes produced. The obi also seems to be endowed with some mystical qualities that seem to make the courtiers around seem less than competent. When you wear the obi all Social TN against you are raised by 5, and any Raise they make increases their TN by 8 instead of 5. You also gain a bonus on your Courtier (Manipulation), and Courtier (Political maneuvering) rolls equal to your etiquette skill.

IMPERIAL BREED FALCON (2 POINTS)

Imperials are known for producing many fine quality items. One of these items that has been used as gifts to other courtiers and has been given great fanfare and respect is the Imperial breed Falcons. They are arguably better trained and better hunters than the falcon of the Toritaka. The Falcon gives you an extra 1k0 on your Hunting rolls when hunting small game, and on any Animal Handling (Falcons) roll.

Wargames

Kata

UPDATED KATA *Sword of the Sun*

Preparation Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 120 minutes
Rank: Akodo Bushi 2, Seppun Guardsman 2
Cost: 6
Special: You must have Honor Rank 2 or more.

Effect: The kata is a complex move in which the practitioner moves his sword over his head so that it reflects the light to blind his opponent. One targeted opponent within 10 feet must make a Perception roll against the user's Agility x 5 or be blinded for 1k1 rounds. The damage inflicted by the practitioner increases by 1k1 when striking the blinded target.

Void: None.

NEW KATA *Channeling the Void*

Preparation Time: 60 minutes
Duration: 60 minutes
Rank: School Rank 1 for any bushi school with Iaijutsu as a School Skill or any School Rank 3 for the others
Cost: 6

Effect: For the duration of this kata, outside of a duel, all Raises (Free or not) on an Iaijutsu roll increase the TN by an additional +1. During a duel, you can reduce your number of maximum focus by 1 to have +3 on a single Iaijutsu roll. You cannot sacrifice more than one focus in this manner per Iaijutsu roll.

NEW KATA *Wings of Inspiration*

Preparation Time: 20 minutes
Duration: 60 minutes
Rank: any Artisan School Rank 2
Cost: 6

Effect: When you learn this kata, choose one Performance or Artisan skill as your Primary Skill for the purpose of this kata, and choose a different Performance or Artisan skill as your Secondary Skill. As you practice your Secondary Skill during this kata, you find inspiration that you will use while performing your Primary Skill. At the end of the preparation time, make an Awareness/Secondary Skill roll in which the TN equals five times your rank in the Primary Skill. If you succeed, you gain a Free Raise on all your Primary Skill rolls for the duration of the kata.

Okuma

Spells

AIR SPELL *Cryptic Cipher*

This is a secret spell of the Imperial shugenja and Kuroiban. The Imperial families have always needed to send secret messages, and not surprisingly they created a spell that can hide important information within an ordinary, bland letter. The Kuroiban, the secret Scorpion organization, has helped with the development and use of this spell to fight against the plots of maho-tsukai and other enemies of the Empire.

Mastery Level 1
Duration: permanent
Area of effect: one scroll
Range: touch

Targeting the scroll, the shugenja must write a message and the real name of the person (or group) he wants the hidden message to be visible to. For all other readers, the message displayed will be mundane and irrelevant (a

supply list, a birthday reminder note, a recipe, etc.), and the scroll will have no particular quality. To the intended reader, the scroll will display the real message. The spell Reflections of P'an Ku will reveal that there is something hidden, but 4 Raises are necessary to pierce the illusion.

EARTH SPELL *Blood Curse*

This is a secret spell of the Kuni family, inquisitors and Jade Magistrate. The Kuni family created this spell to punish the maho-tsukai who call on the power of blood. They later shared it with the Jade Magistrate during Kuni Utagu's and Kuni Tokiaji's tenure as Jade Champions.

Mastery Level 3
Duration: instantaneous
Area of Effect: A single maho-user who has cast a maho spell, and hasn't cleaned the blood.
Range: 25'

This spell had been created to punish the maho-tsukai, turning the blood used to cast maho spells into a weapon against the targeted maho user. The blood turns into a solid black substance, and inflicts XkX damage, where X is the mastery level of the last maho spell cast by the target.

EARTH SPELL The Final Gift

This is a secret spell of the Imperial shugenja. The Hidden Guard's first duty is to protect the Emperor, and they are ready to sacrifice their lives for that. This spell transfers all elemental imbalances from the target's body to a volunteer's, saving the target's life. Often, a prisoner who has agreed to sacrifice his life in exchange for forgiveness of his crimes is kept with the Hidden Guard.

Mastery Level 3

Duration: instantaneous

Area of Effect: two targets.

Range: touch

This spell transfers all wounds, poisons and diseases from one voluntary target to another.

WATER SPELL Miya's Mercy

This is a secret spell of the Imperial shugenja. The Miya have always been known for their desire for peace, and as the Imperial Heralds they have organized many tournaments. They created this spell to provide medical care to the participants of these tournaments that got harmed.

Mastery Level 3

Duration: full concentration, maximum 10 rounds.

Area of effect: one target.

Range: touch

This spell takes 10 rounds to cast. The target experiences the same effects as if the spells Path to Inner Peace, Rejuvenating Vapors and Near to Ice was cast, but the effects granted by the last two spells end when Miya's Mercy ends. This spell can be cast on the same target multiple times per day, but only the first casting will allow spells to be recovered. Further, Miya's Mercy cannot be combined with Rejuvenating Vapors.

WATER SPELL

Miya's Sasumata

This is a secret spell of the Imperial shugenja. Shugenja are rare among the Miya, but a few do exist. They share their siblings' desire for peace, and created this spell to have a defensive weapon that will not kill their opponent.

Mastery Level 4

Duration: 10 rounds

Area of Effect: self

Range: self

This spell creates a sasumata that inflicts XkX damage, where X is your Water Ring. This weapon is wielded exactly like a traditional sasumata, using the Polearms skill. All excess damage inflicted by this weapon that would put the opponent beyond the "Out" Wound Level is ignored, and if there is not enough damage to put the target down to the "Out" Wound Level in one strike, then the weapon deals no damage at all. An opponent taken to the "Out" Wound Level by this sasumata will regain consciousness after a number of hours equal to your Insight Rank.

Okuma

Ancestors

In concordance with the new L5R Third Edition ancestor rules published by AEG in *Masters of War*, here are some new Imperial-themed ancestors' professions and drives.

Profession

Ambassador: Your ancestor was an ambassador to the court of some neighboring daimyo. While in the lands of that lord, your effective Glory is considered 5 points higher. You gain 1 Rank in the Etiquette skill. This Rank is added to any existing Ranks, but may not increase your total Skill Rank above 3.

Geisha, high-class: Your ancestor was a popular geisha who was in high demand and eventually became the concubine of a powerful lord. You get a Free Raise when using the Storytelling skill. You get a Free Raise when using one Performance skill of your choice.

Hatamoto: Your ancestor was a hatamoto, serving his lord as his official representative. You gain +2k0 on Etiquette rolls.

Imperial Legionnaire: Your ancestor was a member of the Imperial Legion. You gain one Free Raise per day to be used on any Bugei skill.

Imperial Magistrate: Your ancestor was an Emerald or Jade Magistrate in service of the Empire. You gain 5

points of Glory and 1 rank in either the Lore: Law or Lore: Maho skill. This Rank is added to any existing Ranks, but may not increase your total Skill Rank above 3.

Imperial Blood: Your ancestor was of Imperial blood. You gain a full Rank of Status. Also, you will be held at a higher standard, so any Glory gain or loss will be increased by 1 point.

Karo: Your ancestor was a karo, an advisor to a lord. Add +2 to the total of your Courtier rolls. You gain the same bonus on a Lore skill of your choice.

Matchmaker: Your ancestor arranged many important political unions. You may gain +1k0 on any Social Rolls against persons who are actively looking for a suitable match for their children or themselves.

Negotiator: Your ancestor was a skilled negotiator able to settle disputes of any kind. When making an opposed social roll, you may add your Status Rank to the total of the roll if you are not involved in the dispute, business, or matter. You may also gain a Free Raise if either of the two parties is friendly to you, 2 Free Raises if both are.

Scribe: Your ancestor was a scribe to a lord and was tasked with keeping important records. You gain a Free Raise on Calligraphy rolls.

Drive

Gossip: Your ancestor was an incorrigible gossip always eager to hear or spread the newest juicy quip. You gain 1 Rank in the Courtier skill as well as the Gossip Emphasis for free. This Rank is added to any existing Ranks, but may not increase your total Skill Rank above 3.

Greed: Even though your ancestor had no need of it, he was raised in the lap of luxury and grew accustomed to a life of opulence. He was driven to acquire more wealth. You start with 2 more koku. Your annual stipend will also be increased by 2 koku.

Jealousy: Your ancestor was notoriously jealous of anyone he perceived as better than him, which drove him to prove his superiority at every occasion. You gain a Free Raise on any contested skill rolls made for the purpose of proving your superiority.

Perfection: Your ancestor thrived to achieve perfection. Choose a skill. When you spend a Void point to gain +1k1 on a roll using this skill, you gain an additional +1k0.

Strife: Your ancestor was a conniving and mean spirited person, who reveled in pitting friends against each other. You gain a Free Raise on any skill roll made to create or preserve a conflict between two, or more, persons or groups.

Vanity: Your ancestor had an unusually high opinion of himself. You gain +2k0 when using the Storytelling (Bragging) skill.

Kalajel

Imperial Heritage Tables

TABLE 1 (START HERE)

- 1-4 **Dishonorable Past**, roll on Table 2
- 5-7 **Mixed Blessings**, roll on Table 3
- 8-0 **Distinguished Past**, roll on Table 4

TABLE 2: DISHONORABLE PAST

- 1 **Gozoku!** - Your ancestor was a member of the infamous Gozoku Alliance, and worked hard to undermine the power of the Emperor in their name. Gain the Black Sheep disadvantage (but not the CP for it).
- 2 **Cruel** - During the Reign of Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum, your family served the throne very well, perhaps too well. After a lifetime under such a ruler, your family became jaded with the supplications of others. Gain the Cruel and Insensitive disadvantages (but not the CP for them).
- 3 **Pampered** - A position in the Imperial Court leads one to tremendous wealth and access to only the best of material things. Some fail to avoid this pitfall

and become accustomed to such things. Gain the Spoiled disadvantage (but not the CP for it).

- 4 **Traitor!** - Someone in your past sold information to an enemy of the throne, causing an upheaval within the ruling class. Lose 5 points of Honor, and gain the Bad Reputation (traitor) disadvantage (but not the CP for it).
- 5 **Failure** - Training in the Imperial Legions is intense and complete. Despite his training however, your ancestor was a complete failure. In the end he took his life to cleanse himself and his family of the shame, but some things cannot be washed away so easily. Gain the Doubt disadvantage (but not the CP for it) for one of your school skills, and the Jealousy disadvantage (but not the CP for it) toward a character with the same or higher rank in that same skill.
- 6 **Evil Omens** - You were born under bad portents, the entire world aligned just so at the time of your birth, pointing to a sinister future. Gain the disadvantages Dark Fate, Bad Fortune, and Unlucky (3 points) (but not the CP for them).

7 **Kolat!** - For generations, your family labored beneath the nose of the Empire itself, trying to further the goals of the Kolat. Then, the purge began, and they were uncovered. Lose 5 points of Status, and gain the Dark Secret (Kolat) disadvantage (but not the CP for it).

8 **Coward** - When the throne is in danger, the courage of the samurai in service to the Emperor is put to the test. An ancestor of yours failed this test and ran in the face of danger. Gain the Coward (4 points) disadvantage (but not the CP for it).

9 **Meddler** - The power and prestige in the courts of the Emperor can be too much for some to ignore. Gain the Meddler disadvantage, and Sworn Enemy (2 points) (but no CP for it).

0 **Unbeliever** - Since the appearance of the Little Teacher himself, you and your family have had issues with religion in Rokugan. Gain the Cast Out (6 points) disadvantage (but not the CP for it) with the religious sect of your choice.

TABLE 3: MIXED BLESSINGS

1-2 **Emperor's Favored** - One of your ancestors held a piece of information that helped the Emperor through a particularly difficult time. Gain 5 points of Glory, 5 points of Status, and the Rumormonger disadvantage (but not the CP for it).

3-4 **Imperial Yojimbo** - Long ago, a member of your family was given the duty of protecting a less than honorable charge. Duels were not uncommon. Gain 5 points of Honor, and the Sworn Enemy (2 points) disadvantage (but no CP for it).

5-6 **Court Scribe** - Not a single Imperial document left the capital that had not been approved by your ancestor. Gain 2 ranks of the Calligraphy Skill, a free Emphasis of your choice for the skill, and the Antisocial disadvantage (but no CP for it).

7-8 **Unfulfilled Duty** - A member of your family died before fulfilling a duty given to him by the Imperial order. Gain the Haunted (3 points) and Unlucky (3 points) disadvantages (but not the CP for them), and 2 ranks of any one High Skill.

9-0 **Political Marriage** - Marriage in Rokugan is generally more for political gain than about love. To ease relations between the clans you were married into a Great Clan. Gain the Bitter Betrothal disadvantage (but no CP for it), and you gain a 5 points discount on the Multiple Schools advantage for the schools of your new clan.

TABLE 4: DISTINGUISHED PAST

1 **Second Battle of the Shadowlands** - Your ancestor followed Hantei Fujiwa into the Shadowlands to fight the evil forces of Fu-Leng for the second time in the history of Rokugan. Gain 2 ranks of the Lore: Shadowlands skill, and 5 points of Honor.

2 **Defeat of the Gozoku** - Your family fought alongside the other loyal servants of the throne to overthrow the Gozoku Alliance and reinstate the power of the Emperor. Gain 5 points of Status, and 5 points of Glory.

3 **Emperor's Blessing** - You are a descendant of the great writer Miya Mai, author of "The Emperor's Blessing." You have the innate skills of a tremendously talented writer. Gain the Great Potential (Storytelling) advantage.

4 **Battle of Stolen Graves** - When Iuchiban attacked Otosan Uchi centuries ago, an ancestor of yours was on the frontlines, battling against his evil. Once the battle was won, he dedicated his life to learning more about maho and how to fight against it. Gain 2 ranks of the Spellcraft skill, and the Maho Emphasis.

5 **Articles of Heaven** - Seppun Hanako was a member of your family from generations past, when she wrote the "Articles of Heaven" for Hantei XVII it inspired all of you to dedicate yourselves to the example she set forth. Gain 1 rank of the Lore: Law and Investigation skills, and a free Emphasis of your choice in each.

6 **Subtlety of the Court** - The writings of your ancestor have been passed down through your family and have come into your possession. Gain the Inheritance: Subtlety of the Court advantage (see p.30).

7 **Scorpion Clan Coup** - The Scorpion are loathed by nearly everyone in the Empire, but since the Coup, when so many of your family fell to their blades, you have a particular hatred for them. Gain the Heart of Vengeance (Scorpion Clan) advantage.

8 **Imperial Guard** - Few have been granted the prestigious honor to protect the Emperor and his family. Your ancestor was chosen for the position, a fact that not many will forget. Gain 1 rank of Glory that does not fade with time, and 2 ranks of the Defense skill.

9 **Imperial Magistrate** - One of the most prestigious duties in the land is that of magistrate, and Imperial Magistrates are the elite of this order. The ranks of the Imperial Magistrates accept only the truest samurai. Gain 1 rank of Honor, and a free Emphasis of your choice in both the Investigation and Lore: Law skills.

0 **Herald** - Your ancestor was one of the many heralds in service to the Empire. Gain the Fleet (2 points) advantage, and 1 rank of the Lore: Heraldry skill.

Akodo Harubi

◆ The Smithy ◆

Characters

Seppun Tsuchi

Some Imperials gain power and prestige through the elegance of their words, some from the strength of their steel, and still others from the beauty of their art. A select few achieve status through sheer luck and heritage. Tsuchi is one of the lucky. He is the only son of a man who once was the yojimbo for Toturi and Kaede's three children. Thanks to this lineage he has tremendous status within the palace, and power that he hardly knows how to deal with. He is proud and ever aware of the awe with which others view him. He does not feel that he will ever be of use on the battlefield, and is terrified of speaking in court. His true brilliance, in his estimation, is in his ability as a duelist and yojimbo, and he is always ready to demonstrate.

Tsuchi has trodden on many reaching fingers during his time atop the ladder of power, and unsurprisingly he has made a few enemies. Acting as a yojimbo to an Imperial courtier, he dueled a young Lion and defeated him with ease. The lion has sworn that Tsuchi will fall by his hand, and it will not be as pretty as the actions in court.

SEPPUN TSUCHI

School/Rank: Seppun Bushi 2, Seppun Duelist 1

Insight: 190

Earth: 2	Water: 3	Fire: 3	Air: 3	Void: 4
Glory: 3		Status: 5.5		Honor: 3.5

Skills: Battle 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 6, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Medicine 2, Meditation 2, War Fans 5.

Advantages: Social Position (10 points).

Disadvantages: Doubt (Battle), Phobia (Speaking in Court, 4 points), Sworn Enemy (2 points).

Heritage: "Imperial Yojimbo".

Ancestor: Yojimbo 1/Honor 1.

Kata: Striking as Fire, Striking as Water, The World is Empty.

Dojo: Dojo of the Emperor's Hand.

Toturi Yuya

Yuya is definitely full of mysteries. She is a representative in the Imperial Court, but is hardly one of the most glorious or noble of the present members. She is a courtier, to be sure, but with interesting abilities. No one knows her past, except that she has sworn fealty to the Toturi family. Toturi Yuya has become a fascination at court, although no one wants to admit it.

Many years ago, as a young girl, Yuya presented herself to the Monkey Clan, looking for a place to belong. She explained to Toku Inao how she was the granddaughter of a soldier that fought alongside Toku and Toturi themselves during the Clan War. Her mother had just died, and she was looking for a home with the Monkey Clan. She stayed for several months, training with the bushi at Toku Torid-e. One day, a visiting sensei of the Toturi bushi dojo came, and at once noticed her developing skills. He promptly asked whether he could spend some time with her. The Monkey sensei allowed him to train her, and she took to her new sensei's lessons like a natural. He asked her if she had considered swearing fealty to the Toturi and taking on the responsibilities involved. She agreed and he took her back to the capital to train her more fully. Upon her gempukku, she was given a very specific duty. She was placed in the Imperial Court as a spy for the Emperor, keeping an eye out for the Lying Darkness (thanks to her Harmonic Alignment advantage). Yuya was stationed there to keep an eye out for any possible threats to the Throne, and to be unexpected backup in the case of emergency. She has performed her job admirably ever since.

She is one of the first people to meet and greet newcomers to the court, so she can sense if they carry any hint of the Lying Darkness. As such, any PC coming to the Court would definitely come into contact with her, and she would surely keep an eye on them for the duration of their stay.

TOTURI YUYA

School/Rank: Toturi Bushi 3

Insight: 197

Earth: 2	Water: 4	Fire: 3	Air: 3	Void: 2
		Agility: 4		
Glory: 2		Status: 2.5		Honor: 3.5

Skills: Battle (Battle Lore) 5, Courtier 5, Defense 5, Etiquette 5, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: History 2, Spears 3, Storytelling (Oratory) 5, War Fans (Menhari Gata) 7.

Advantages: Harmonic Alignment.

Disadvantages: Doubt (Kenjutsu), Haunted (3 points), Jealousy (2 points, Seppun Tsuchi), Spoiled, Unlucky (3 points).

Heritage: "Unfulfilled Duty".

Ancestor: Outcast 1/Courage 1.

Kata: Striking as Water, Striking as Fire.

Dojo: Dojo of the Emperor's Hand.

Otomo Noriko

Noriko is an ambitious petite courtier, and makes friends easily despite her handicap (she is blind). She has allies in every great clan, and is always looking for more. When in court, she is never far from one of these allies who help her to spot possible new connections. As soon as decorum will allow, she will place herself in a position to meet anyone she has not yet had opportunity to speak to. She will always find the right words to woo the person she is speaking to, either with flattery or subtle reminders of her Imperial lineage.

Growing up as a young Imperial, Noriko had aspirations to become an artist. She had not always been blind, and she used to see how the colors of the Empire blended so well to make a beautiful scene. Her hand ached with the desire to paint the scenes she saw everyday, but her dreams were shattered when her sight started to fade. Eventually her eyesight was completely gone. It was at that time that she learned of a talented ancestor of hers, Otomo Ryosen. He was a man devoted to putting on paper the very pictures she remembered, but in words rather than colored inks. She had his tales and poems recited to her, and she loved them. Some began to wonder whether she would follow in Ryosen's footsteps or not, and create stories as marvelous as he had. They still wait with baited breath as she has yet to speak before the courts. Perhaps a PC could convince her to do so?

OTOMO NORIKO

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 2

Insight: 173

Earth: 2	Water: 2	Fire: 3	Air: 4	Void: 3
Honor: 3.5		Glory: 2		Status: 2.5

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Deceit (Intimidation) 5, Defense 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 4, Investigation 1, Lore: Law 2, Storytelling (Poetry) 5.

Advantages: Allies (More than she could even remember).

Disadvantages: Blind.

Heritage: "Artist's Touch".

Ancestor: Courtier 1/ Duty 1.

Dojo: Court of the Emperor's Will.

Seppun Oda

Oda is a man that many people do not seem to care for very much. He is a paragon of bushido, and incredibly dedicated to his job. You will not find him extremely sociable, and he tends to hate being anywhere near a court session. His duties in the Hidden Guard require him to work discreetly in the background of the court goings-on. It is something he considers a blessing as it allows him to stay away from the influence of all the men and women he considers "mislead" by a little man spouting nonsense. Seppun Oda does not believe in the word of Shinsei, and believes that the Fortunes exist only to further their own goals. He, of course, does not advertise his beliefs much, considering he was cast out by the Temple of the Thousand Fortunes for talking about it. Bitter is not a state of mind for Oda, it is his only state of

mind. All these things aside, he is definitely the best there is at what he does. There is no better investigator not wearing a Dragon mon or a magistrate's seal.

Seppun Oda is tasked with investigations of anything irregular within the castle. He would naturally be the man to see were the PC to know of any sort of crime or mishap anywhere near the Emperor or his retainers.

SEPPUN ODA

School/Rank: Seppun Shugenja 4

Insight: 205

Earth: 3	Water: 4	Fire: 2	Air: 3	Void: 4
Status: 4.5		Glory: 4		Honor: 3.5

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Defense 5, Divination 3, Etiquette 3, Investigation (Notice, Search, Interrogation) 7, Knives 3, Lore: Law 2, Meditation (Void Recovery) 3, Spellcraft (Elemental Knowledge) 5, Theology 1, Underworld 3.

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Irreproachable (4 points)

Disadvantages: Antisocial (2 points), Can't Lie, Cast Out (6 points), Small.

Heritage: "Unbeliever".

Ancestor: Karo 1/Justice 2.

Dojo: Dojo of the Emperor's Hand.

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, By The Light of Lady Moon*, Secrets on the Wind*, Whispering Wind*, Echoes on a Breeze, Wisdom of the Kami, Know the Mind, Path to Inner Peace, Reflections of Pan Ku, Reflective Pool, The Ties that Bind, Wisdom and Clarity, Jade Strike. * indicates Innate Ability.

Miya Yodoshi

Yodoshi is a bright eyed youngster fresh out of his gempukku, fascinated about his world and ready to trek back and forth across the empire, fulfilling his new Herald duties. There is really not much else to say about Yodoshi. At 16, he is fully trained and tested, but life in the outside world is much different than in the dojo he just left.

Yodoshi can often be found riding his horse around Toshi Ranbo, exploring the areas that are now open to him as he awaits his first assignment. He is always ready and willing to assist travelers in finding their way in the lands that he now knows better than most.

MIYA YODOSHI

School/Rank: Miya Herald 1

Insight: 144

Earth: 2	Water: 3	Fire: 2	Air: 3	Void: 2
Glory: 1.5		Status: 1.5		Honor: 3.5

Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Defense 3, Etiquette (Conversation) 2, Horsemanship 5, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Heraldry (Crane) 3, Lore: Heraldry (Lion) 3.

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Way of the Land (Toshi Ranbo).

Disadvantages: Gullible, Soft-Hearted.

Heritage: "Defeating the Gozoku".

Ancestor: Hatamoto 1/Compassion 1.

Dojo: None.

Akodo Harubi

武者修行

The Smithy

◆ The Theater ◆

Standing Their Ground

My grandfather's sword. It has never weighed so much as it does now, Seppun Kojimo pondered as he picked up the blade. Not even when I had tried to lift it, on a dare. But then I was only five years old.

Then, it had simply been idly standing on its daisho stand. Now, there was a duty that came with the blade.

All around him, the Seppun guard were putting on their armor and inspecting their blades one last time. Their obligations clear, their task well defined. No words were exchanged - no doubts spoken.

Only thought, Kojimo reflected, his own dark thoughts and doubts swirling in his mind.

In the midst of the fray, it was but a single sword stroke amongst hundreds that day - but certainly one of the most important ones, especially for those involved.

The anonymous bandit, victim of the strike - never to profit from the fruits of his crimes anymore. Never to prey on the weak again.

The Seppun daimyo, saved from a gruesome death at the hands of the now-slain bandit.

The Matsu warrior, his sword arm guided by his ancestors.

"Your deed will not be forgotten, Matsu-san. You saved my life today. Whatever you need, whatever you want, you shall have it," said the Seppun.

Matsu Godaigo only bowed before returning to the fight. He had his sword, and his duty. That was all he needed.

None of the Seppun and Hantei loyalists cheered as Kojimo rallied them. There was no glory, no honor to be had in this fight, and they all knew it.

Strangely, Kojimo found himself missing the simplicity of the bloody battles he had fought when the traitorous Bayushi Shouju had attempted to usurp the Jade Throne. Then, his cause was just, the enemies clearly identified.

But now...

Ichiro looked over his shoulder to see how Sanjiro was doing - and saw that the other youth was gaining on him. Cold air burning his lungs, his blood pounding in his ears, he wondered where his friend's burst of energy came from. Sanjiro was the strongest, but Ichiro

had always been the fastest. Was it the thought of their imminent gempukku that made him take one last deep breath of youth's innocent joys?

Tomorrow they would be men, finally taking their true names. He would become Kojimo. His friend had shared his secret with him, and had chosen to be named Yota. A new life would begin, full of adventures and challenges, in which they would have to earn their Matsu names and honor their ancestors.

"For Rokugan!" the Seppun shouted as they fought the black-clad Scorpion. The Imperial guards were only a handful, but they had conviction at their side, and the Scorpion were tired. Kojimo saw his leader fall, the banner of the Imperial heir slipping from his stilled fingers, and he rushed forward, grabbing the standard while holding off the assassins with his wakizashi. No one would sully this sacred banner as long as he would breath.

When the last traitor to the Empire fell, Kojimo's hands were slick with blood - his own, and the scorpions' - but the banner was still held high. The boy who now was the Son of the Heavens was staring wide-eyed around himself. Kojimo was the only one near enough to observe the moment where surprise and astonishment in Sotorii's eyes were replaced by anger - and lust for vengeance.

Kojimo did not know where to look.

His left hand, shaking even though he tried to stop it?

His right hand, holding the blade he was so proud of, the blade now dripping blood and guts on the Imperial Palace's corridor?

The corridor itself? But that would only lead to the sight he wished to avoid.

The Crab warrior he had just slain, then?

The last man of this particular platoon, caught wandering the maze of corridors that made up a sizeable portion of the Imperial Palace, showed clear signs of exposure to the taint - even now, it was oozing dark green blood from many wounds. It had been a bushi of the Crab Clan, had made oaths to defend the Empire from the Shadowlands, and yet it had come to this place in order to slay the Emperor Kojimo had been sworn to defend.

Kojimo's road was clear, as it had been for generations of Seppun, all the way back to the first Seppun

who swore an oath to the first Hantei. After his father, Matsu Godaigo, had saved a Seppun daimyo from certain death, the grateful Seppun arranged an Imperial marriage for the Matsu's only son. Kojimo had taken the Seppun name and the prestigious duties that came with it during a sumptuous ceremony. He had barely contained the urge to roar his joy and pride that morning.

But today, Kojimo's resolve wavered, for the man standing at his right shoulder, fighting at his side, was but a shade of his friend's former self - the physical evidence of his Matsu ancestry irrevocably replaced by the ravages of the taint. Truly, Yota's newly-gained reserves of strength and endurance were what had allowed Kojimo's squad to prevail over the Crab, but at what price? Sometimes the price of failure was smaller than the price of victory.

Kojimo felt weary; physically after this engagement that was only the latest of a long series, and mentally so confused. His men were looking at him for orders, guidance, anything. He had nothing to give them - no encouragement, no lies to clear the doubts from their minds.

"For the Great Bear!" The shouting came louder again, and a trio of Hida berserkers charged around the corridor's corner, their exposed torsos revealing wounds enough to fell normal men.

"For the Emperor!" Kojimo shouted in response, and lifted his blade as new energy ran in his veins. He had cleared his mind: his Lion ancestors guided his arm, and he was a Seppun guardsman now. He was his oaths; without those oaths he was nothing.

His peace made, the Seppun stepped forward, his sword slicing through the first of the berserkers and in one fluid movement, through the second too - but the tetsubo of the third came crashing down, and his blade was not in place nearly fast enough to block the strike.



He reeled from the blow, the world spinning around him. Through blurred eyes he saw how Yota crashed into the last berserker, impaling himself on the hida's spiked armor whilst driving his katana deep into the bushi's stomach - so deep that it scarred the wall behind them.

"Rally!" Kojimo shouted to the few remaining loyal troops following him. "Rally for the Emperor! Rally for Rokugan!"

"For Rokugan!" they shouted, hoarsely, raggedly, many of them exhausted by the fighting and the wounds they suffered - but proudly!

"For Rokugan and the Hantei! Rokugan!"

Yasuki Nokeda snapped his whip above the head of his wards and the pack of goblins under his command returned to march order - or whatever passed for march order for those crude beasts. Nokeda spat, ordered the goblin clan forward, and then looked at what his troops had been tempted to loot. A single Seppun, dead. His still body in a grotesque pose, laid like a discarded rag doll over a pile of fallen Lion and Crab samurai. *What a waste, he thought. You should have stayed out of this battle, Imperial. Oaths or no oaths, to stand against the Great Bear is to fall.* His restless troops started to squabble, and Nokeda lifted his glance from the past. No use wasting time to reflect on the dead - after all, a glorious future awaited the Crab, and Nokeda was determined to be part of that future, whatever the cost. Being at the front, leading the assault, had never been an obsession for him, but being in the front row for the rewards still was. Slowly, a rare grin grew on his face as he ordered his troops towards the throne room.

Kris Van Beurden

Challenge, Focus, Strike

The Dark Artist

Challenge: Miya Kaishaku is a wealthy Imperial with close ties to Imperial Court, and a skilled painter. While he is not one of the Great Masters, he has a great deal of renown. His greatest treasure though, is a gallery and collection of some of the finest and rarest pieces of art in the empire: painted screens, fans, wall hangings, finely glazed tea sets, and delicate lacquer-ware. The finest specimens of all can be found inside his private estates, shown only to a mere handful of people a year he invites to view his collection. The PCs are sent by their Lord to obtain an invitation and win the favor of the Miya.

Focus: Miya Kaishaku is willing to invite their Lord, but on one condition: in town, a wandering artist has been commissioned paintings by the locals. He works only for those that find him and he does not make it easy. People whisper of the truly amazing paintings he produces and how lifelike they seem. Few will admit to having one of his paintings in their possession, and none shows them, but everyone is willing to help find where the painter is. Once found, the painter agrees to create a painting for Lord Kaishaku, but warns, "Few people can truly appreciate the meaning of my work. For me to grace one with a painting calls down the interest of the Heavens and brings about the future he or she most needs."

Strike: The painter has a secret power, granted him by a denizen of the Realm of Tricksters; his paintings reveal the past. When someone asks him to make them a painting, he always includes an element of their own personal past, and it is always the darkest, most terrible secret they possess. The secret itself is cleverly hidden somehow, so that most will never see it, but a canny observer might. Perhaps the picture shows a family portrait, with an illegitimate son staring out a doorway nearby. Or maybe the scene is that of a brave warrior marching into battle, slaying his enemies to either side, yet one of the men cut down by his blade in the foreground looks an awful lot like his elder (and inheriting) sibling. The painter wants to avoid painting pictures for people, but part of the gift is that if asked, he must paint the picture, he has no choice. As such, he makes himself hard to find and tries to paint only the most trivial of things, just to earn enough to survive. Overall, he is the saddest man one could meet; after all, the first thing he painted was his own image.

The Map Is Not The Territory

Challenge: At the beginning of each Emperor's reign, it is a tradition for him to appoint an Imperial Map Maker to update and ratify the newest map of the empire, containing every slight boundary change, new villages, and all manner of small improvements reflecting recent changes throughout the Empire. As the Imperial Court readies for a new Emperor, they have taken it upon themselves to start this process, so that the new dynasty has a full accounting of the Empire ready at the time of the coronation. Typically, one or more representatives from each Clan are chosen to assist the Imperial Cartographer in their duties, however with the current chaos engulfing the Empire, they must gather the best (or merely the best available) people they can. The PCs are chosen to review the submitted maps from each Clan and approve them for the greater map to be made.

Focus: The problem is that for over 1,200 years, the attempt usually breaks down into petty bickering and feuds over the smallest of matters and boundary shifts, and the first Emperor required unanimous approval of each map, so the maps have never really been changed. Small matters, yes, but the current Imperial map is so out of date and inaccurate that it is considered a joke Empire-wide. Furthermore, the room where maps are stored for approval has a thousand year backlog of maps with a host of changes. If that's not bad enough, the Clans themselves each try desperately to influence the map council to approve this land grab or another. The PCs can expect to have to deal with hundreds of maps, some accurate, some not. They must worry about the courtiers of each Clan trying to bribe, cajole, blackmail, or threaten them into agreeing with their desires. They must also find a way for all to agree on a single map before the Court simply accepts the old one as always.

Strike: One of the Clans has a secret. They submitted several out-of-date maps with the dates changed and had hidden the real map somewhere inside the map room (so they can honestly admit they submitted the current map), and hopes that no-one notices that the newest map isn't much different from the old one. They are hiding a secret so great that it could destabilize their Clan's entire power structure. It could be a second pass carefully hewn out of the Mountains that matches the old Beiden pass in size (Crane, Lion, and Scorpion). It could be a collection of islands stocked with ports and warships (Mantis). For the northern Clans (Dragon, Phoenix, and Unicorn) it could be new provinces beyond the Mountains in the lands of the Yobanjin. Even the southern Clans could have

inroads into Shinomen Mori (Crab, Scorpion). Whatever the secret, it is truly a massive secret that must be covered up, at any cost.

Crime Spree

Challenge: A bold thief has been plaguing the Imperial City. Choose a suitably daring name, thing like Wind, Shadow, Flash or the like. He only strikes the rich and powerful, and he always leaves a signature item (A silk veil, or an obi, prayer beads etc...). Frequently, but not always, he takes nothing of actual real value. The PCs are tasked with ending the crime spree.

Focus: The thief is actually a very bored Imperial heir, Ukihishimaru. He is doing it out of fun.

Strike: Some crime syndicates in town might work against the PCs as the thief's activities distract the public's attention from their own activities, while others might help them because the increased magistrate presence disrupts their operations. Alternatively, when the PCs finally confront or capture Ukihishimaru they find him over the body of a powerful Lord. Did he kill him because he was surprised mid-robery, or is this an elaborate set-up?

Backstabbing

Challenge: The PCs are invited to meet an important Imperial Daimyo at a secluded location. When they arrive there, they find that the meeting is actually with his son, who is serving as the middleman.

Focus: The young lord tasks the PCs with murdering a blackmailer/spy that has found some important information on the family. Unfortunately, the miscreant is politically untouchable, and they don't want to tip off that the spy has been found out anyway. The young lord provides access into the family palace to the PCs.

Strike: There is no spy. This is merely an elaborate ruse of the young lord to kill his elder brother (the supposed spy) and become the first in the line of succession. If the PCs do manage to kill the older brother they will soon find themselves pursued by the Imperial Lord, who wants to punish the killers, and the younger brother who wants to eliminate witnesses of his own treachery.

As this setup can cause the PCs' death, some foreshadowing might be in order. The younger brother may be shifty and an Investigation/Courtier test may reveal that he is hiding something. As the PCs search for their target they may eavesdrop (accidentally, of course, no right minded samurai would do it intentionally) on conversations that hint of bad blood among the brothers, or that describe the older brother in a similar way to the supposed spy. Finally, if all else fails, when the PCs get a drop on the spy, he might be accompanied by an elderly retainer, or even a concubine (ideally someone who isn't a real threat to the players) that will defend the lord, at the risk of their own life against the PCs, or even have the lord clearly identify himself if the PCs strike more or less in the open.

There is also the real risk of the party ending up as ronin. This isn't really a problem if your players don't mind, or if they started off as ronin, in which case getting out alive is reward enough, but if they aren't into this, the best way to avoid it is to allow the party to discover the plot as soon as possible, so they can take early measures to neutralize the menace, and, possibly reap political benefits.

The Prodigy

Challenge: A famed seer predicts that one of the PCs will greatly enhance the fortunes of his clan by crafting a legendary item to be gifted to the Emperor/Clan Daimyo/Rival Clan Daimyo/Friendly Clan Daimyo etc...

Focus: The PC is greatly promoted in status, showered with gifts, sycophants hound him night and day, all of his wishes being catered to.

Strike: The PC is also expected to display great proficiency in the chosen artisan skill. Enemies of his clan may try to prevent the "great fortune" from happening, often in violent ways, the sycophants may rob him of any relaxing time, rivals will be even more bitter, and his superiors won't be all that patient about the time required to produce the great piece of craftsmanship.

Note: the "item" may very well be simply a poem or a perfect display of the Tea Ceremony.

The Dancing Elephant

Cautionary warning: The following CFS is a direct rip-off from Winter Court Kakita. It is presented here only to outline the possible ritual surrounding a sumai bout. Evidently this is an excellent CFS to unleash upon the combat brute finding himself at winter court.

Challenge: For some reason a formal sumai contest is announced. This may be entertainment for bored courtiers at winter court, a regular event, or a ploy to humiliate/embarrass a possible contestant (either a "garden flower" courtier without combat skill, or the combat monster with maxed Anti-Social because "he won't do much talking").

Focus: Sumai ritual is actually quite elaborate. The wrestlers must first greet the judges and purify the ring. This should be made through a moderate difficulty Etiquette roll (maybe two somewhat easier rolls if you wish).

The combat itself is won either by pushing the opponent out of the ring or by making him touch the ground with anything other than the soles of his feet. Mechanically, this can be represented either by two consecutive successful shoves (see Bearers of Jade for details), by a throw (WotD and the 2nd Ed. Player's Guide), or through the Knockdown maneuver.

After the combat is over the contestants must once again greet the judges and purify themselves (new Etiquette rolls).

Strike: Part of the reward of the Tournament is performing a ritual dance before the highest ranking

samurai present. The TN should be no less than 20, but if the GM feels like being nice, he may rule that there is a Sumai emphasis of Jiuujutsu that, as an ability, allows the character to add his rank in the Jiuujutsu skill to Dance rolls when performing this specific ritual Dance...

The White Stag

Challenge: The PCs' daimyo is to receive a visit by an important member of the Imperial families.

Focus: To impress the Imperial dignitary, the daimyo orders the party to capture, alive, a small herd of White Stags (that is, a stag and some does...).

Strike: The catch is that the White Stag is considered sacrosanct, and simply drawing blood from one, let alone kill one, even accidentally, will be punished by death. Thus, the PCs have to capture a band of wild deer, without harming them in any way possible. Wish them luck...

Growing Pains

Children can form the unifying point of many a campaign. Their parents might have duties that prevent them from taking a more active role in the child's care, but they are likely to try and give them the best opportunities they can by putting them under the care of capable and trusted retainers.

It can also deal with multi-clan parties by making the child a hostage, or an Imperial that can call upon the favors of multiple clans.

Typical roles in the retinue of a child would include those of yojimbo, a kenjutsu or spellcraft instructor, an etiquette/history/theology instructor, a horsemanship instructor, and healer. Other attendants are also possible, but they would probably be commoners in charge of menial tasks and grooming.

Challenge: The child of the PCs' lord is nearing the age to start his schooling and the characters are asked to take the child into their care during the process

Focus: This is not a typical CFS in that it does not include a Strike. This extended CFS works much better as the outline of a full campaign, with several peripheral adventures using the child as a focal point.

Possible complications:

- The child is spoiled and doesn't take to the characters controlling him.
- The child is just plain tireless and has a knack to put himself in harm's way.
- The child takes to hero-worshiping the characters to the point of robbing them of any privacy.
- The child is used in a hostage exchange and the PCs now have to school and protect him in hostile territory.
- The child proves to be rather inept in his field of study. The parents, of course, want to hear none of that, and blame the teachers and retinue for the child's ineptitude.
- Rivals decide to strike the lord through the child.
- The lord's family line is dispossessed. Will the PCs remain loyal to the child and continue to care for him?
- The child's family lands are conquered in warfare. Will the PCs aid the child in reclaiming his birthright?
- The child proves to be unpopular among his classmates. There may be a valid reason or not for this, but how will the PCs handle it either way?
- Even after gempukku, the PCs are expected to continue their tutoring role for a while. However, the now adult will most likely outrank them even if he is uncertain on how to deal with his new responsibilities and lacks the more experienced PCs' judgment. The tensions between both parties while they settle in their new relation can provide for many sessions.
- As the child's tutors, the PCs are likely to have a very important role in the preparation of his gempukku. This may include the choice of guests, the preparation of the trials themselves and other hosting duties. Not to mention that they must ensure the child is ready to pass gempukku.
- Illnesses/Accidents/Curses may happen to the child while in the PCs' care.
- As the child grows older he may start to display an interest in the opposite sex, or even in the same sex. Even if he does not, nothing prevents other children from showing interest. Few things can match the resolve of teenagers bent to get into trouble, and the PCs are all that stand in their way...
- As part of their guardian role, it may come to the PCs to find a suitable marriage for their charge.
- The child may take part in a very prestigious gempukku tournament that occurs in Crane lands, the Topaz Championship. Passing your own gempukku is not the only thing of interest that can happen at the Topaz championship, most of all when so many VIPs from every clan may be present.

Feel free to match any of the above complications in a way you like. For instance, the originally spoiled child may take to hero-worship the characters after they save him from an assassin.

Also, the coming of age of the child is no reason to end the campaign. If the child wins the Topaz Championship there is no reason why he wouldn't take the PCs has his loyal retainers.

Some of these complications lend themselves to very different adventures. If the child's family is destroyed, recovering family heirlooms from the enemy is a source of countless adventures, and the climax of the campaign might be the raising of an army and the battles to reclaim the ancestral home.

Finally there is no reason why the child, so impressed by the way the PCs raised him, would not make them his main advisors.

Of course he may also put them in charge of raising his own sons as they have proven themselves fine tutors...

Corruption

Challenge: The PCs come to a village (via order of a superior or their travel) in the Imperial Lands, one which is known as a rich and flourishing place. But upon their arrival, they notice the fear on the villagers' faces. Soon they see a young woman being arrested by two ronin. If asked, they will answer that they are in service of the Imperial magistrate overseeing the village. After this incident, a servant of the magistrate delivers an invitation for tea.

Focus: The PCs may or may not know (through a successful Courtier check for example) that the magistrate of this village is Seppun Masaru. However, they are greeted by Otomo Shiro instead. He welcomes them kindly and after a friendly chat about their travel and recent adventures, Shiro requests them to do him a favor.

He claims to be the supervisor in charge of this part of the Imperial fiefdoms – including this village. There have been many irregularities lately and so he came here for what he thought would be a simple inspection and correction of minor mistakes. Instead, he found a village under the reign of a corrupt tyrant. He has collected several testimonies from the villagers, but the former magistrate and his younger brother have fled. If asked about the young woman the PCs saw being arrested, Shiro explains that sadly some peasants are so afraid of Masaru that he has to coerce them to come and testify. As he has only a few ronin under his command and no time to wait for reinforcements, he begs the PCs to find and capture Seppun Masaru and his younger brother.

He assures them that he would be in their debt, and if they should be still unwilling he will invoke the Imperial law and demand their help (a very good Lore: Law check will reveal that his interpretation of the situation is not secure but he still outranks the PCs...)

Strike: Otomo Shiro is a liar. He is indeed charged with the supervision of these lands and he has lived well of it, since he is more than willing to accept bribes in exchange for leniency toward mistakes or corruption. He came to the village and found no faults, crimes or corruption. This did not detain him from demanding (discreetly of course) a bribe. As Masaru refused he began to “investigate” the village, forcing the villagers to give false testimonies about the “crimes” of their magistrate. Masaru, bound by law, could do nothing but send a letter to his superiors. This letter never left the district as some of Shiro’s men killed the messenger, and hid the body. One day the younger brother of Masaru, Seppun Takuma, drowned his anger about the Otomo and his behavior in sake. Drunk and angry he went to the house where Shiro interrogated another villager and gave him a terrible bashing. After this incident, and because he received no reply to his letter, Masaru took Takuma and fled.

Whom will the PCs help? If they find out about the Otomo’s actions, how can they stand against a representative of the mighty Otomo family?

Complications: The Otomo has far more ronin in his service than he has told the PCs. They will secretly pursue them and may even ambush them should they help the

Seppun. Of course they can’t be traced back to the Otomo since they are “just some ronin bandits”.

If the PCs tell Masaru and Takuma about the arrest of the young woman and describe her, they will notice that the younger brother becomes pale. The woman is Yuzuki, daughter of a sake merchant and the Takumi’s beloved. Of course, he will steal himself away to rescue her from the claws of the Otomo...

Mind over Manners

Challenge: The player characters are chosen to attend and assist a high-ranking, influential member of one of the Imperial families. His name is Nadakai, and while he is said to be somewhat eccentric he is unquestionably recognized as one of the most powerful men in the courts. The player characters are explicitly cautioned against offending him, as doing so would have major political implications for them and their superiors.

Focus: After a few days in Nadakai’s service the player characters begin to notice that he occasionally says things that are odd or incorrect. He attributes well known quotes by Shinsei to other figures. He refers to people or items by the wrong names. He misremembers details about recent events. His lapses may even cause him to call a deer a horse. None of his other aides finds anything wrong with his behavior. They simply nod and go about their duties. Still, the longer the PCs remain in his service the more egregious his errors seem to become.

Strike: Nadakai is well-aware that what he says is incorrect. In truth, he is a remarkably sharp and perceptive individual. His remarks are made on purpose, as part of a test for those who serve him. He has a great disdain for sycophants, and prizes honesty and intelligence over empty words and slavish obedience. If anyone actually musters the courage to speak up correct him, they will quickly find themselves in his favor. Those who simply say what they think he wants to hear will never get into his good graces.

It is also possible to turn this scenario around, with Nadakai seeking advisors who will support him no matter what he says. In this case, his claims that deer are horses and birds are fish are meant as cues for the PCs to chime in with their agreement. Those who show that they are willing to swear by his words without hesitation will gain a place in his entourage, while those who disagree will be given the cold shoulder. Depending on the personalities and attitudes of your players (and the ways in which they portray their characters), you can alter the situation to make the adventure more or less difficult.

Remember that while Nadakai wants to find aides who are willing to think for themselves and speak up when something is wrong (or not, depending on which version of this adventure you prefer), he still adheres to Rokugani notions of manners and pride. He does not say anything foolish when guests or visitors are present in the household, lest he lose face and be thought incompetent. Nor does he make any deliberate mistakes on matters that could later prove hazardous. PCs who notice these facts may gain a clue about Nadakai’s true intentions.

武者修行

The Inn

Likewise, while Nadakai hopes that he can find people who fit his profile for good advisors, he still expects the respect he is due. After all, he is still a member of the Imperial family, and the PCs are members of his staff. If they are not able to temper their words with tact and delicacy, they may be in for a severe reprimand, or possibly even something worse. Characters who are not skilled in the ways of etiquette and sincerity may actually make things worse for themselves by speaking up, no matter how close their words are to what Nadakai wants to hear.

If the PCs manage to convince Nadakai through their reactions that they would serve him well, you can easily extend this adventure by having him assign them to tasks that further test their character. If he has chosen them for their honesty and forthrightness, he may ask them to conduct a critical investigation and report their findings before the court. Will they be able to bring themselves to speak the ugly truths that they find? Alternately, if he favors them as unwavering supporters, he could command them to help cast doubt on the words of a political rival. Can they bear repeating their superior's lies over and over again?

One especially difficult situation involves making the PCs choose between honesty and loyalty by making two NPCs disagree about something. Any figures are acceptable as long as the PC has some sort of bond with each of them. It could be Nadakai and their former commander, their father and their sensei, their daimyo and a learned monk, or even their mother and their wife. Whatever the situation, each of them are convinced that their opinion is the only right one and asks the PC to support them. Such a choice can be just as stress-inducing as an iaijutsu duel, and even more deadly!

The Empty Pot

Challenge: The PCs receive a message from Miya Goden, a wise and venerable diplomat. Having heard of the heroic deeds that the party has accomplished, he invites them to his estate. Upon arriving, however, they find several groups of samurai present. It seems that the elderly diplomat intends to retire soon and is searching for someone to take his place. Once all the potential candidates have arrived, Goden announces that he has devised a challenge to select his successor. He gives a seed to everyone present, explaining that caring for the people of the Empire is much the same as cultivating a beautiful flower. Those who wish to be considered should place their seed in a pot of soil and care for it for the next three months. When they come back, he says, he will judge how well they have done.

Focus: Those PCs who try to grow a flower from their seed will find it is much more difficult than they expect. No matter what they do, their seed refuses to grow into a flower. Not a single sprout or bud emerges. Water and sunlight have no effect, nor can it be awakened by magic. It seems that the PCs do not have the skills necessary to care for a seed as they would the people of the Empire, and as the deadline approaches their pots remain empty. To make matters worse, they hear rumors that several of

their rivals have already succeeded in growing flowers that are quite amazing to behold.

Strike: The seeds were boiled before they were distributed, and would not have grown no matter what the PCs tried. Those who claim to have produced healthy, beautiful flowers have cheated. Goden knows this, and passes judgment accordingly. If the PCs stoop to cheating they will be dismissed without any explanation. If, however, they were honorable and honest enough to admit their failure, they will be rewarded with a prestigious appointment in the service of the Miya family.

If you wish, the challenge can be adapted to center on some other task instead of gardening. Goden may ask the candidates to protect the local villagers from wolves that roam in the forest. Those who return with pelts and tales of bravery will be disqualified once they learn that no wolves have been sighted in the area for over thirty years. Or, the hopeful samurai could be asked to climb a mountain and bring back one of the many blue stones that are said to be found at the peak. Only those who actually make the trek will know that the stones from the summit are a deep red color. Almost any task where there is the potential for cheating or cutting corners will serve as an adequate test of the player characters' integrity.

If there are no characters in the party with low enough honor to consider cheating you can have an outside party bring up the subject instead. An ambitious friend or family member could encourage them to use a different seed to cover up their failure, possibly even attempting to justify their suggestion with an excuse about the seed not being as important as the test of their gardening skill. Or perhaps a well-meaning servant tries to find out what is wrong with the plant and offers to get a new seed instead of the old one. An opportunistic merchant could promise to get the reluctant seed to grow in exchange for several koku worth of payment, placing a new seed in the pot while no one is looking and collecting his fee (with some investigation after the fact revealing that he has cheated several of the candidates this way). There are several ways you can present opportunities, and with the right encouragement you may be able to instill enough of a competitive spirit in the PCs to tempt them. You don't have to force them to cheat, but that doesn't mean you can't make it at least a little appealing.

On the other hand, if it turns out that no one in the party is willing to bend the rules you can have Goden present another challenge. After all, it stands to reason that there might be one or two honest souls amongst the other competitors as well. If this is the case, simply test them in another virtue of bushido. Goden gives each of the remaining candidates a sack full of koku and tells them to travel to the capitol as fast as they can. The shortest route takes the travelers through a village that has recently been ravaged by a fire. Even if the PCs realize that Goden intends for them to give aid to the peasants, they may not catch on to the fact that his criteria for judging the success of their mission is not how fast they arrive, but how much of the koku they distributed to the needy.

One last possibility lies in having an ally of the PCs go through the process in their place. She does exactly what

Goden hopes, displaying her honor and integrity time and time again. Only after the diplomat has deemed her worthy of taking over his duties do the PCs learn that she was given inside information by one of Goden's servants. They can reveal her duplicity to Goden and urge him to reconsider, keep their mouths shut, or even confront her by themselves, but each approach is fraught with the potential for trouble. It never hurts to have friends in high places, but can you really put someone in a position of power if they would lie and cheat in order to get it? Just knowing the truth might be enough to place them in harm's way...

In the Name of the Emperor

Challenge: It is a time of great chaos. An army is marching on the Imperial capitol. It could be a usurper from one of the Great Clans, yobanjin raiders, a horde of ronin and bandit revolutionaries, or even monsters from the Shadowlands. Whatever the case, the future of the Empire hangs in the balance.

The player characters are pressed into service by Fubatsu, a general from the Seppun family. He places a unit of ashigaru under their command and orders them to hold one of the main bridges south of the capitol. Before he leaves he makes them swear in the name of the Emperor that they will let no one pass until he returns. Then, he rides off to see to the other defenders.

Focus: Several hours later, an army approaches from the south. They claim to be reinforcements from the Third Legion who were separated from the rest of their unit. Their commander is dead, and the highest ranking soldier among them is but a gunso. He has no banner, seal, or papers to prove his identity, but he insists that the situation is direr than anyone suspects and that all soldiers are needed at the capitol as soon as possible.

Strike: The PCs must decide what they will do in this situation. Their orders still stand, and no one would fault them for holding to them. On the other hand, if the gunso from the Third Legion is correct then delaying troops from reaching the capitol could result in a dire crisis. Every second that goes by wastes precious time, and the choice the PCs make could mean the difference between tragedy and salvation.

Whether or not the gunso is telling the truth is up to you. He could be an enemy soldier in disguise, or possibly a traitor. On the other hand, he really could have vital information about the movements of the attackers. Maybe he wants to join the battle simply to make a name for himself, or to seek a glorious death in battle. He might even be leading his men in the wrong direction due to a tactical error. With only limited information to go on all the PCs have is their own judgment, and you should emphasize the fact that the final choice is up to them.

With these possibilities in mind, you can decide what the true situation is beforehand, or wait until after the PCs make their choice and tailor the truth to the story you want to tell. Sometimes a good tragedy can be as entertaining as a tale of heroism. Also, if you wish you can punish or reward the PCs no matter what choice they make. If they stand firm Fubatsu may praise them for

their devotion to duty, even if turns out that the gunso was telling the truth. On the other hand, he could just as easily chastise them for being too literal and keeping vital reinforcements from reaching the front. Alternately, if the PCs let the gunso and his men pass (or even go with the gunso), then they might arrive just in time to save the day and win much glory for their families. Or, they could be dishonored for dereliction of duty and failure to keep an important tactical position out of the hands of the enemy. It's even possible for Fubatsu to praise them for making a good decision and still be forced to discipline them for breaking an oath made in the Emperor's name. Honorable characters may even feel guilty and insist upon it.

One possible twist on this scenario is to start from the end. Have the PCs and the gunso summoned before Fubatsu. The battle is over, but he wishes for them to explain their actions. Then, flash back to the point where he commanded them to hold the bridge. Play out the adventure as the PCs "tell" their story. Once they choose whether or not to let the gunso pass you can return to the present and have Fubatsu pass judgment on whether or not their decision was correct.

Both success and failure can lead the PCs on to further adventures. If they distinguish themselves well Fubatsu may select them for greater duties in the Imperial Legions. If they choose poorly they may be forced to perform some mission or quest in order to redeem themselves. The esteem a famous general of the Seppun has for the party is sure to have a major impact on how they are regarded by others, so they would do well to make sure they find some way to impress him.

**Akodo akira, Mirumoto Kuro,
Shosuro Shingen & Isawa Nazomitsu**

Ambition's Inferno

“Be wary of the fires of ambition, samurai... many weaker souls have succumbed to its inferno.”

- Ikoma Teiko

Plot Synopsis

An overlooked Miya courtier is driven to manipulate a minor Phoenix daimyo into a possible war with the Crane, in exchange for documents slurring the name of an Emperor from the beginning of the Empire. It is up to the players to thwart his plot, and protect the good name of the Hantei line.

Dramatis Personae

Here are the main characters of this adventure. Schools and Ranks provided are only indicative. It's up to the Gamemaster to tweak them to better suit his needs.

Miya Hiroji (Otomo Courtier 4)

Throughout his life, Miya Hiroji had been an underachiever. His intellect was plain to everyone, yet as a youth, he never applied himself to his lessons. He was much more prone to reading the great works of fiction of the Empire, or to fish when he could. He barely made it through his gempukku, his intelligence being his only saving grace.

As an adult, he did not fare much better. He was known for living frivolously, and was relegated to unimportant, symbolic tasks in the name of his family. Everyone accepted that Hiroji would live and die as just another stone in the river, not distinguishable from thousands of others.

Hiroji became irritated by this. He knew he was better than his peers, and got angry fits, sulking for weeks, whenever another family member was promoted to a more prestigious position.

Only about a year ago, Hiroji started hearing rumors about an indiscretion of a past Emperor, one that didn't

Ambition's Inferno in Your Campaign

It is completely possible to use this adventure as written, with your PC's being visitors to Shiba Danjuro's court. If however, you would like to make this the story of another daimyo, or even your PC's own daimyo, the clans and names of the characters can easily be changed to suit your game. This adventure has been written to be as timeline and clan independent as possible.

appear in any historical record. Immediately his mind raced, and he realized that this was a blessing: if he could obtain proof of this “embarrassment”, he could convince his daimyo to promote him... Or else the past would be revealed and the honor of the Hantei line tainted. And surely his daimyo wouldn't allow for that to happen?

This plan was perfect for Hiroji: he could get the recognition he deserved, without having to actually earn it. After some months of work, he traced the keepers of these papers. Like pieces of a jigsaw, none of these documents, when taken separately, could smear the Emperor's name. This is the reason they had escaped the vigilance of the Scorpion masters of secrets and the Ikoma historians. Only together and cross-referenced they told the whole story, and thus their owners never realized the value of what they gave to Hiroji. The last of them, however, a man named Yoritomo Zhao, had received information about Hiroji's peculiar endeavor, and understood the powerful bargaining chip he had in his possession. Though by itself the document was of little value to the Mantis, he wasn't going to give it to Hiroji for free though, oh no. He had to do something for him in return.

This brings us to the present day, where Miya Hiroji has managed to get himself assigned as a temporary advisor to a minor Phoenix daimyo, one Shiba Danjuro. The Mantis have made sure that there is a Daidoji Magistrate overstepping his authority on the Phoenix border. All Hiroji has to do is make sure that Danjuro responds with excessive force, and those documents will be his in return.

Yoritomo Zhao (Tsuruchi Bounty Hunter 3)

Yoritomo Zhao is working under orders from his daimyo. The Crane clan is locking down on Mantis ships, and the welfare of the Clan is suffering because of it. Zhao was ordered to “distract” the Crane, by any means possible. When he was approached by Miya Hiroji about some documents he had been holding on for some years, he immediately saw his chance to inflict an economic blow to the Crane.

Shiba Danjuro (Shiba Bushi 4)

He is a minor daimyo of the Phoenix. It is a great honor for him and his house to have been granted a Miya advisor to assist him for a couple of months. He is not entirely sure why this has been bestowed upon him, but he is not one to question either. He has been preparing his estate for weeks now, hoping to appear distinguished to his Imperial guest.

Bayushi Kazuo (Bayushi Bushi 2 / Bayushi Defender)

A couple of years ago, Danjuro had trade disputes with Bayushi Ten, a minor daimyo of the Bayushi. When eventually they had settled their differences, it was decided

that Ten's youngest son, Kazuo, would be exchanged as a hostage to live with the Shiba, his release completely dependant on Danjuro's whim.

It has been almost 4 years that Kazuo has stayed with the Shiba. He is known as a good fighter, and also as the best kemari player in the castle.

However, as far as his prowess in physical activities stretch, as short is his temper. He had always been known as being prone to outbursts of anger, but since his father visited him about a month ago, his rudeness has become even worse. There is much speculation about what was said during the brief, private conversation the two had, but most agree that something must have occurred during this meeting that has changed his attitude so.

Ikoma Teiko, as Shosuro Kasumi (Ikoma Spymaster 3)

During her training, Teiko's sensei would frequently remark that her talents were those of a Scorpion. They were wrong: they exceed those of the Scorpion. For six months now, Teiko has lived and worked with the Snowflake Acting Troupe. This troupe is known across the Empire for their excellent work, and has garnered a lot of glory for their patron, Miya Hiroji.

Almost a year ago, Teiko was informed by the historians of the Ikoma that Miya Hiroji was querying about documents which allegedly revealed indiscretions of a past Emperor. She was tasked to determine the truth about these rumors and, if the documents were real, make sure these papers never became public. She passed herself off as an actress, and managed to become part of Hiroji's troupe.

She knows that he has manipulated his way to the castle of Shiba Danjuro, and that he will receive these documents here. Her orders are to obtain them, and make sure that they do not become public (the Ikoma believe that it is their duty to protect the Hantei line).

The Adventure

DAY ONE

It is up to the GM to decide whether his PC's are vassals of Danjuro, or whether they are guests of the castle for another reason. If so, they will have been asked to assemble in the courtyard for the arrival of Hiroji. It is also possible that the PC's had been asked to escort the Miya on the last leg of his journey to the castle, in which case they will arrive with him and the rest of his retainers.

11:00

It is a brisk, clear day, with only the slightest breeze shifting the breaths of the samurai stationed at the castle of Shiba Danjuro.

A lone horseman rides down a road up to the castle, where the heavy wooden gates moan open. He rides in, to be greeted by a courtyard filled with hundreds of faces, all in the finest dress, and everyone in their place. At the opposite end of the courtyard, there is a small dais, with only the most noble inhabitants of the keep perched upon

it. In the centre of these, is a middle-aged man, with dark hair tied in a top-knot, and pitch black sideburns framing his face.

The rider dismounts, and bows low. "In the name of our Emperor, I present one of his most honorable servants, Miya Hiroji-sama!"

Seconds later, a regiment of Imperial Guards march through the gates, in the centre of which is an open palanquin. On it is the announced guest, a graying man with noble features. Behind the group of guards, a small retinue of retainers follows.

Everyone in the courtyard bows low, prostrating themselves to the most honorable guest this castle has likely ever seen.

Miya Hiroji dismounts the palanquin, and moves toward the dais. Those who dare peeking are stunned by the grace of the man's stroll.

Shiba Danjuro bows low. "Miya Hiroji-sama, welcome to this castle, the humble court of Shiba Danjuro. Your presence here is a column of light upon my castle."

"Well met, Shiba Danjuro-san. The pleasure of being here is all mine."

"You are too kind. Please follow me inside the castle, where we can continue our conversation".

The Imperial and the daimyo make their way to an entrance behind the dais. Those assembled begin to rise, and slowly make their way back to their stations and daily tasks.

11:30

It is soon announced (via runners and messengers within the castle) that there will be a performance by the Snowflake Acting Troupe at 17:00, which will be followed by a feast. (Intelligence/Courtier TN15 to know that the Snowflake Troupe is extremely famous for their performances).

Unless they have other duties, the PC's are basically free to roam the castle until then. The castle houses most of the facilities one would expect, such as a dojo, parade grounds, baths, various shrines, a small library, and a well-kept garden.

Servants run around fervently trying to make the final preparations for tonight's feast, and the entire castle is swarming with activity. In between servants falling over themselves and over-eager bushi trying to impress the new guests, these are some of the scenes that PC's might stumble upon:

Kemari in The Courtyard

Soon after the welcoming, the courtyard clears, and is taken up by a group of 7 young samurai playing kemari, the ball-game favored by courtiers.

Among the young Phoenix samurai, one stands out for two reasons: he is clearly a superior player to the rest, and he is dressed in black, his look completed by a mask.

That player is Bayushi Kazuo, the son of another minor Scorpion daimyo, and a hostage of the castle. He has been in the castle for some years now, to the point where it is becoming an embarrassment for him. Some

Phoenix in the castle never fail to bring this matter to his attention, and he is regularly ridiculed for something that is beyond his control.

As a reaction to this, he has practiced kenjutsu with fervor. Additionally, he has developed a short temper to match. Since a brief visit by his father some weeks ago, his attitude has worsened, placing him on the level of being "tolerated" by many. It has become a favorite topic of gossip in the castle of what his father had said on his visit that has caused Kazuo's behavior to worsen so much.

He is not very talkative to the PC's, and will say nothing much of import.

If the PC's decide to join in on the game, they can beat Kazuo on an Agility/Kemari roll TN25.

Silhouettes

On the one end of the long, rectangular hall of the castle, the Snowflake Acting Troupe is preparing for their performance tonight. A small stage has been assembled, with some screens set up to give the actors private spaces to ready themselves for their play.

All seven of them are there, busy assembling the stage and screens, while others are laying out the costumes, make-up and other necessities.

Most of the actors are too busy to waste time chatting to the PC's, except for an exceptionally beautiful woman who introduces herself as Shosuro Kasumi. She won't reveal the name of the play to be performed; only revealing that it is a work by the famous 7th century playwright Otomo Fukusaburu. (Intelligence/Lore (History) TN15 will remind that the PC's that Otomo Fukusaburu was famous for the very violent plays he often wrote).

She will make idle banter with the PC's for a while, before excusing herself to "continue preparations for tonight's performance."

None of the actors, including Kasumi, will allow the PC's to come behind the screens that have been set up, saying that they would "hate for their secrets to be revealed to the public."

A Lesson on War

If any of the PC's enters the castle's library, they will find a group of roughly 20 captains listening attentively to a lecture given by an old samurai, Shiba Ryusen.

If they listen in, they will hear the retired magistrate talking about certain legal protocols to be followed on a battlefield.

Soon the lecture stops, and Ryusen dismisses the captains, who promptly leave.

If the PC's decide to talk to Ryusen, they find him to be an approachable and helpful man, if not exactly friendly. His years in the military and on the road shows in everything he does.

He complains about a certain Daidoji magistrate that has been traversing the border towns of the Phoenix, requesting taxes from the local peasants. There have been two reports of him killing the headmen of villages that didn't comply.

Ryusen is very concerned about this taxation of clearly Phoenix villages. He has requested his daimyo to act on this, but to no avail. Danjuro is "afraid to take action, and laughs the reports off as rumors and tall-tales of imaginative peasants".

If asked about Bayushi Kazuo, he merely remarks that he is "a welcome guest of the castle, and proves to have great talent for the blade."

The Lay of the Land

Whenever the PC's are outside at any time during this period, they will notice Shosuro Kasumi exploring the castle grounds, by circling the inside perimeter of the walls or thoroughly going through the garden.

If asked what she is doing, she will inform the PC's that her preparations for the evening are done, and that she is merely "exploring her new, temporary home."

Of course, unbeknownst to the PC's, she is studying the castle in light of her mission.

17:00

An extremely graceful maiden enters the stage, almost floating across the wooden boards, the slightest ruffling of a kimono being the only audible sound. She makes her way toward an actor dressed in light blue and white.

"So sorry, Kakita-sama, but I cannot marry you. I have already been arranged to enter into wedlock with Isawa Sato-sama, and he is a samurai worthy of my respect and faithfulness. Again, I am so sorry, but I think it best if we not discuss this matter anymore."

The blue samurai stares at the maiden, and moves his hand toward her face. A white screen is drawn across the front of the stage, the play of the shadows on it tastefully leaving room for the imagination.

Everyone in the hall is engrossed by the performance, many having never seen theatre of such a standard. Subtly, unfolding slowly like the great tale being performed, the faint smell of the food for the coming feast permeates the room.

Two men are facing each other, their hands at the hilts of their swords. A lone biwa is making the only sound in the room, its lingering twangs slowing all the hearts in the room down to match its own restraint. "You will pay for your indiscretions, Kakita. My only regret is, that even your life cannot replace what you have taken from Shikochan," the calm, yet commanding, voice is coming from the orange-clad hero.

"You value the wench too highly; I have met street women in Ryoko Owari with more refinement, Sato."

In a flash, swords are drawn, and the stage is covered in red silk. It is the Isawa that slumps to the floor. In a distant corner of the stage, the beautiful girl can be seen, crying softly.

The actors remain motionless, and after a few long moments, screens are placed to close the stage. The play is finished.

There is a long, heavy silence, until the spectators' faces turn to face the opposite end of the hall, where the daimyo, Miya Hiroji, Shiba Ryusen and a few others are sitting on another dais.

"That was indeed stirring, Miya-sama" Shiba Danjuro proclaims for all to hear. "Now that we have nourished our souls, let us feed our bodies!"

Soon a great selection of only the finest food is brought out, complemented with drinks. The hall becomes filled with the sounds of talking and music. This is a good time for the PC's to mingle, and possibly meet any important NPC's that they have not encountered.

Amidst all the wonderful food being brought out, the samurai of the castle discuss a wide variety of topics. The problems with the Daidoji magistrate seem to be popular, along with the incessant arguments of what Kazuo's father could have told (or ordered?) him that has aggravated him so much lately.

Bayushi Kazuo can be seen sitting on the opposite end of the hall, drinking heavily. He is surrounded by some younger girls, all vying for his attention, but he seems uninterested, even irritated by them. He simply stares at Danjuro, his drinking-arm almost locked in a state of automatism. The look on his face is calm, focused, and dangerous.

Amidst the polite conversation of those assembled around him, he suddenly stands up straight, facing toward Danjuro. Many of the more alert samurai in the hall are ready to draw swords.

"For long enough you have done nothing, Shiba Danjuro-sama, at the expense of your own good name!" the youth says through his teeth. "I challenge you to an Ichisachi duel, tonight!"

Danjuro stares at Kazuo, revealing no emotion, for a couple of baited breaths. Then he looks at Shiba Ryusen. "Yes, my lord, he does have the standing to make such a challenge". "Very well, Bayushi Kazuo-san. In an hour, we can meet in the gardens by the stream."

Kazuo's face breaks into the slightest of smiles, and nods. He turns on his heel, and walks out of the hall. Any PC's looking for him afterward cannot seem to find him.

The normal sounds of the feast return. The hottest conversation topics revolve around what Kazuo could have meant with his words, and what his chances are in the duel. Attentive PC's might notice that Shiba Danjuro has stopped drinking sake (Perception TN10).

Ichisachi Challenge

An Ichisachi challenge is when a vassal challenges a superior of his, usually a family or clan daimyo, or even a champion, to a duel to first blood. If the challenger succeeds, he is allowed to make a single request to his superior, who is then duty-bound to grant it, except in extreme cases where he feels it would be against the interest of the family or clan. A samurai can normally issue only one such challenge in his lifetime.

It should be noted that only some daimyo observe this custom, and over the last couple of centuries it has generally fallen into disuse.

The Duel

An hour after Bayushi Kazuo issued his challenge, Danjuro gets up, and slowly moves toward the garden, almost everyone in the castle follow after him in small groups.

Soon everyone assembles next to the river, where Kazuo is already waiting. The reflecting light of the full moon, together with the many lamps that have been lit, all tremble in the stream, in the face of the two men about to face each other.

A servant hands Danjuro his swords, and he takes position facing Kazuo. They bow, and silently fall into their postures, both varying greatly. It is silent, except for the flow of the stream and the sounds of the night-time creatures. The two swordsmen are framed by the low-hanging branches of two Willow trees. The vapors off their breaths betray their slow, rhythmic inhalations.

Like lightning Kazuo draws, and his sword is met by Danjuro's with a loud clang. Both men step back, and bow to each other.

Only as he lowers his katana into a beam of light, can a thin streak of blood be seen on the blade of Bayushi Kazuo.

"You have beaten me fairly, Bayushi-san. What is it that you request?"

A graying man steps from the shadows. "May I suggest that the lord and I take a walk with Bayushi-san, where we can discuss his wishes in the privacy of the garden?" asks Miya Hiroji, looking questioningly at the duelists.

"That is perhaps not a bad idea. Let us walk, Kazuo-san."

The three men take a path down the garden, and quickly disappear in the darkness. The assembled crowds begin to scatter, all of them talking about the duel, the strategies displayed, and the repercussions of the outcome.

Note: Kazuo was seen heavily drinking, and then beats an experienced warrior an hour later. A successful Perception/Iaijutsu vs. TN 25 let the observer notice that Danjuro very subtly let Kazuo win, suspecting the scorpion's objective, and offering him an honorable way out of the hostage situation for some reason of his own.

The Garden Walk

While the three men are walking, they discuss Kazuo's request: to leave the castle, and return back home to the Scorpion lands. If the PC's decide to eavesdrop in on the conversation (permitting they roll a successful Agility/Stealth at TN20), they will only be able to hear some parts of it:

Kazuo: "With all due respect, Shiba-sama, this situation is ridiculous and an embarrassment to you. It is time for a decision to be reached".

Danjuro: "I can understand this, Kazuo, but patience has been a virtue of my Clan. One must always consider all options before reaching a conclusion."

Kazuo: "Inaction is the open door through which loss slips in. I have lived long enough in this family to know that it is an honorable one, and this inaction does not reflect the ways of the lord of this castle."

(...) this part of the conversation is muffled by a gust of wind or anything else that would seem appropriate to the Gamemaster.

Danjuro: "Very well, Bayushi-san, I will grant your request. Do not speak of it yet, however. I will announce it as soon as the time proves opportune."

After this, Kazuo is dismissed, and Danjuro and Hiroji continue their walk. Kazuo leaves the garden, where he then retires to his room for the remainder of the evening.

If the PC's decide to eavesdrop on this conversation as well (Again, Agility/Stealth TN20), they will hear the Miya convince Danjuro that a decisive show of power is needed at the Crane border, and that it would be the swiftest resolution to the matter.

Keep in mind, that the PC's will lose an appropriate amount of honor for eavesdropping in on the first conversation, and even more for continuing to do so for the second conversation. Also, unbeknownst to the PC's, Ikoma Teiko also listens in on both of the conversations. They could maybe spot her with a secret Perception roll vs. TN 35. If they see her, and ask her the reason of her presence (thus revealing their own dishonorable action) she will say that she went to relax in the garden right after the performance and hid when Kazuo and Danjuro came to duel, not wanting to bother them. Anything she might have heard was completely by accident since she was trying her hardest not to eavesdrop.

Both Danjuro and Hiroji will return to their quarters afterward. Miya Hiroji will then write a message, simply containing the words "Everything goes according to plan. Will meet you tomorrow behind the waterfall". He gives this note to one of his personal guards, who leaves the castle, and enters the surrounding woods. He will find a specific tree, and leave the note in a hollowed section. He then returns to the castle.

The PC's might very well follow the guard (again using Stealth), and intercept the message. If the confront the guard, he will fight to the death.

Again, if the PC's do not intercept the message, Ikoma Teiko will.

DAY TWO

09:00

Everyone is assembled in the court of Shiba Danjuro. To his side are Shiba Ryusen and Miya Hiroji.

"Samurai, I have an important announcement to make. After much reflection, I have decided that the continual insult to our Clan cannot be tolerated any further. The complete disregard for our sovereignty cannot be ignored." He clears his throat. "Therefore I have decided to send 1000 men to our border with the Crane, to investigate and solve the problem caused by the Daidoji magistrate. You will receive mobilization letters shortly this morning, calling you to be ready to leave tomorrow morning. That is all, you are dismissed."

If the PC's try to judge anyone's reactions (Awareness TN20) they will see that Shiba Ryusen is hiding his dissatisfaction about the decision, while Miya Hiroji is trying his best to keep a stoic face, while suppressing a smile.

09:30

Throughout the morning, the castle is filled with servant running around handing summons to the bushi selected to prepare for mobilization. If the PC's are vassals of Danjuro, they also receive such letters.

The only topic of discussion in the castle is Danjuro's decision. Most are puzzled by the reason behind the scale of the reaction, and soon many theories crop up. Much of the previous night's events make part of these.

By now, the PC's must know that something isn't right—why this overt show of force? Some of the more important clues available to them are: Why did the Snowflake Troupe perform the play that they did? And could this be as a result of Kazuo's request? Or did they even intercept Miya Hiroji's note?

Bayushi Kazuo

He is found on his own, kicking a kemari ball against a wall. He is still his usual brash self (more out of force of habit by now), and won't tell the PC's his request to the daimyo. If asked about the deployment of the Phoenix troops, he says that it is of no concern to him.

Snowflake Acting Troupe

They are found in their makeshift stage area, practicing other pieces and so forth. The others are all too busy to talk to the PC's, except once again for Shosuro Kasumi. Truth be told, the PC's even sense a bit of animosity from the other actors.

Kasumi will be friendly to the PC's, but not have much valuable information for them. If asked why they chose the play they performed last night, she will look over her shoulder at the other actors, and then in a slightly softer voice say "It was a request of our patron, Miya Hiroji-sama".

The Rest of the Morning

The PC's are pretty much free to spend their time as they want. Sometime during the morning, however, a servant will come to the PC's, and hand them a note. It reads:

"I am willing to talk to you. I will meet you at noon, in your room. Bayushi Kazuo."

If the PC's search for him now, they cannot find him anywhere. This is pure coincidence, because he is merely moving around the castle, not avoiding the PC's on purpose.

Some time later, the PC's will receive another note:

"When a man's eyes are made to focus on a single thing, he becomes oblivious to all else. Meet me by the stream at noon. Shosuro Kasumi"

The servant is gone before the PC's can even ask from whom it came.

If the PC's wait by the stream at noon... nothing happens. A few people stroll by, completely unaware of any note or meeting.

If they wait in their room, a group of 2-4 will burst through the windows of the room, their faces covered. They try to kill the PC's as quickly and silently as possible,

and fight to the death. If the PC's try to subdue them, they will try and kill themselves by any means necessary.

What actually happened is that Miya Hiroji's spies in the castle informed him of the meddling by the PC's. He sent a fake letter from Bayushi Kazuo to the PC's. He then ordered the Snowflake Troupe (who also acts as his hit-squad) to kill the PC's in their room.

If the PC's were at the stream (or at least not in their room), and they return to their quarters later, they will find the room in shambles, and a single scroll left behind, reading:

"Stop meddling, or the price to pay will be high".

Enter the Lion

Shortly after the PC's discover the attack (whether they were present for it or not), and before they can raise any alarm, they are cornered by Shosuro Kasumi, at any appropriate location in the castle. When questions are asked, she urges the PC's to lower their voices, and follow her to a secluded spot on the grounds.

"I am not who you think I am, noble samurai" the woman says in a cool, soothing voice. She reaches for her kimono sleeve, and produces a symbol bearing a lion. "I am Ikoma Teiko, in service of my family, clan and the Emperor."

"Some months ago, I was asked to investigate the existence of a series of documents that, when cross-referenced, details a past... indiscretion of a past Emperor. Through my work, I had found out that Miya Hiroji was after these documents as well, and decided to let him find them for me instead. To get closer to him, I managed to get a part with his personal acting troupe, the Snowflake Troupe."

Teiko looks across her shoulders nervously before continuing.

"This is what I have learned: the last document of the series is in the hands of a Mantis named Yoritomo Zhao, and he is willing to hand it to Hiroji, but for a price: Hiroji has to intensify tensions between the Phoenix and the Crane clans. Last night, the Miya convinced Danjuro-sama to act against the Crane so forcefully. I suspect that the issue with the Daidoji magistrate is the Mantis' doing as well."

"I know that the handing-over of the document is happening tonight, but I am not sure where. I would have liked to pursue Hiroji myself, but it would blow my cover. I have studied you, and I trust that you can act in the interest of the Emperor in my stead."

"Therefore I urge you to not expose Hiroji for the traitor he is, at least not yet. It is of great interest that we get our hands on that document first."

"As for the attack on your room, Hiroji had become suspicious of you, and requested his actors to eliminate you. I decided to keep you out of harm's way."

"I urge you, samurai, to bide your time for the rest of the evening, and to make sure you get that document from Miya Hiroji. Only then can we expose him for the traitor he is, and also protect the good name of our Emperor. I am not sure what his plans are for the document, but judging by his character, it cannot be for a noble cause."

The Rest of the Day

The PC's are now basically free to spend the rest of the afternoon as it suits them, until the next event.

Behind the Waterfall

At about midnight in the guests' quarters, the silence of the night is broken by the noise of a door sliding open. From the shadows a single man exits, Miya Hiroji. He slowly makes his way down the hallway, barely acknowledging the guards in the corridor. He then nimbly makes his way down the stairs, and out of the castle's main keep, and into the gardens. He continues all the way to the smaller second gate of the castle. He mutters a few words, and a door is opened for him, where he escapes into the night.

It shouldn't be too difficult for the PC's to follow the Miya (Agility/Stealth TN15 to remain undetected), and to get out of the castle.

If they continue to pursue him, they see him walking through the forest. Every now and then he stops, surveys his surroundings, and it seems like he is reciting something from memory. It is clear that he does not know the area, but is following directions he was given.

The further the PC's follow Hiroji, the louder the sound of crashing water becomes.

Eventually, Hiroji gets to a rather big, thundering waterfall. The river runs very strongly here. He looks through some foliage, and rather easily finds a small rowing boat that could probably hold about three people. He pushes it into the water, and starts rowing toward the waterfall.

When he eventually reaches the side of the fall, he ties his boat to a peg driven into the stone, next to an identical boat. He disembarks, walks along a narrow path, and finally disappears behind the curtain of water.

If the PC's wish to pursue him further, they could either swim (Agility/Athletics TN 20), or try to scale the rock face from the banks of the river (Agility/Athletics TN 15).

When the PC's get into earshot, they can hear the following conversation:

"Here is the document, Miya. I must say, it is quite a pleasure doing business with a man such as yourself..."

"What are you trying to say, Yoritomo?"

"Oh, nothing Miya-sama, So sorry if it sounded like I implied that you have rather... flexible values."

"Anyway, that foolish Danjuro has sent a thousand troops to the Crane border. The deal is now done, now just leave me be. I hope I won't see you again soon, Yoritomo Zhao."

This should be enough for the PC's to be convinced of Hiroji's guilt if they were still unsure. If they burst into the enclave, they will find Hiroji, Yoritomo Zhao, as well as two other Mantis samurai.

Zhao will use his bow and try to take out the Miya first, and then try to fire at the PC's. The other two will use this distraction to make their way to a boat, with the Yoritomo jumping onboard at the last second. The three of them will then use the strong current to move downstream as rapidly as possible.

If the PC's do not kill or subdue the Mantis before they achieve this, it is possible for them to take Hiroji's boat in pursuit.

The boats move very fast down the stream, and the Mantis will try anything to shake the PC's, such as moving faster, taking perilous routes, and shooting at them.

If the PC's manage to keep tailing the Mantis, they will notice that the river keeps running faster and faster, and the sound of another, bigger waterfall approaching...

Afterward

In the end, there are many possible choices for the PC's to make, with many different outcomes.

If the players never suspect any foul play, the Mantis plot runs its course, and the Crane/Phoenix dilemma might soon escalate into an all-out war. Some months later, it is made public that Miya Hiroji has been promoted to a very prestigious position in the Imperial Court.

Even before the final encounter with the Mantis, it shouldn't be too difficult to prove that Miya Hiroji had been using Danjuro. What would be more difficult though, is to find a motive, and to have someone of enough status to challenge Hiroji.

If the PC's do follow Hiroji to the fall, and manage to capture the Mantis, they will deny everything, and try to kill themselves as soon as the opportunity arises.

If they manage to capture Hiroji, he will be angry at first, and deny everything. When the evidence against him becomes insurmountable, he goes into an angry fit and basically "spills the beans" on his plot and his motivations, clearly outlining the role everyone else played. He knows he is going down, but he's taking as many with him as he can.

Because of the nature of the document, this situation is best handled discreetly with Danjuro, and even his superiors. Danjuro will feel like a fool, but commend the PC's on the fact that they foiled Hiroji's scheme.

What Does the Document Contain?

If the PC's take the time to look at the document that was in Zhao's possession, they will see it contains the names and birthdates of dozens of orphans, as well as the name of the orphanage where they are raised (but it is an unfamiliar place none of the PC's ever heard about, and the document doesn't expand on where it is located precisely). It is worthless by itself, but no doubt provides a crucial element to the Emperor's secret story when added to the rest of the documents Hiroji was collecting. The Miya didn't travel with the rest of the documents (that Ikoma Teiko will make sure to find and destroy as well), so the PC's will never know what they were all about, which is probably best for them...

Miya Hiroji will be taken to the Imperial City, where he gets hanged like a common criminal, and his name is erased from all records. No-one is sure exactly why he is treated this way.

Ikoma Teiko will, after the document has served its purpose of convicting Hiroji, destroy it. Further, she will consider the PC's trusted friends in the future.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for suggestion and playtesting: Otaku Mike, Larisse, André, and a big-up to Stephen, Quentin and Heinrich, the Thursday-night Lion Allstars.

Tokkie

❖ Post-Scriptum ❖

So, What's Next?

What can you expect in the next issue of *Musha Shugyo*? Well, I can already tell you the theme will be the Minor Clans.

We'll have extensive info about all the known Minor Clans, as well as advices to use them up to their full potential in your games.

We'll publish the winners of our homebrew competition. More details on this in the box on the right.

Hanami Mura, our homebrewed city, will make its debut in *Musha Shugyo* #2. A fitting start as it's located in Hare lands.

Finally, Mapmeister Kitsune Sachiko will start offering Mystery Maps. What are they? Well, that's a mystery...

When will it be released? Come on, let us catch our collective breath, you just finished reading MS#1...

The idea is to produce 3 or 4 issues per year, so that's a release rhythm of one 'zine every 3 or 4 months. If the Fortunes are with us a bit longer, then you can expect MS#2 around the beginning of June 2008.

This fanzine is a collective work, and we will always need motivated contributors. There are 3 essential qualities that we are looking for in contributors: to be willing to tackle any L5R topic, to be a team player, to have enough free time to devote to the zine. If you feel inspired by what you see here and think you can contribute, then send us a few samples of your creations at musha.shugyo.l5r@gmail.com. If we like it, you'll be invited to join our exclusive little club, complete with great perks like free cigars, open bar by the pool, and... err, wait... no, there are no perks. But we're nice :)

Writers are welcome, but we can also use more proofreaders and even artists for some illustrations (yes, this issue is sorely lacking in illustrations—I'm sorry Tokkie!). I'm coming for you Utaku Kumanagai!

If you have suggestions regarding any aspect of *Musha Shugyo* (content, topics for articles, layout, etc.), feel free to drop us a line at the above email address, or post a comment in the dedicated thread on the AEG boards, we're interested to know what you think. And praises, yes, we like praises :)

See you in a few months!

Mikael Brodu

Musha Shugyo #2
Homebrew Contest

Many of the Minor Clans maintain a special relationship with one or more Great Clans. The Minor Clans Alliance recently promoted increased collaboration between them as well.

This contest proposes to reflect these alliances with specially designed new Paths. The only rule is that the Path must establish a bridge between two clans, either between a Great and a Minor Clan (either way) or between two Minor Clans, via the path of entry and the path of egress. Of course, such a Path also needs to make sense in the world of Rokugan.

Each contestant can submit up to three new Paths, and the deadline for the contest is the 1st of May 2008. Send your entries at musha.shugyo.l5r@gmail.com. The winning Path will be published in *Musha Shugyo* #2, in the Dojo section. Depending on the number of entries, we might publish up to 3 winners.

We are waiting for your creations!